

OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

Australian Background Report

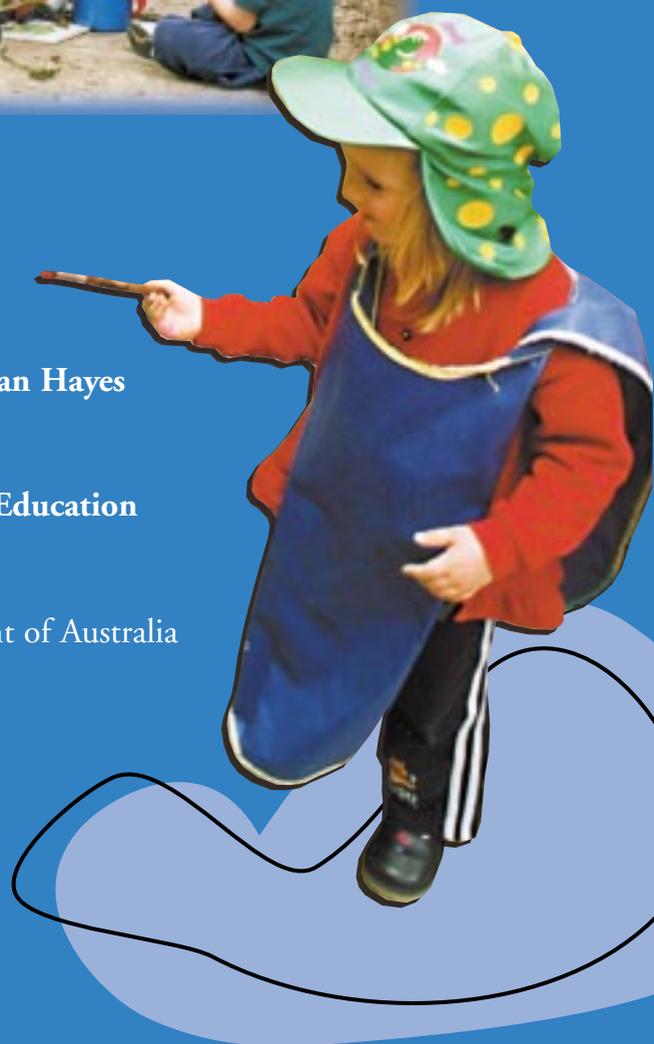


Prepared by

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Institute of Early Childhood
Division of Early Childhood and Education
Macquarie University, Sydney

For the Commonwealth Government of Australia



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS



DEPARTMENT OF
FAMILY AND
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SERVICES

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The number of individuals who met with us on our visits around the country or assisted us is too large to thank each personally. Suffice it to say that without your input this report would be much the poorer. Our hope is that this report, and the OECD review that follows, may enrich the future for children, families and communities across the nation.

Alan Hayes and Frances Press
Project Directors
Macquarie University
May 2000

Preamble

A significant aspect of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Australia is its diverse and at times complex nature. Variations in policy approaches to, and delivery of, ECEC arise out of the number and mix of jurisdictions involved in developing policy and funding frameworks for the care and education of young children. Whilst a degree of national consistency exists for policy and services which fall under Commonwealth programs, there is no national framework for ECEC which encompasses all relevant portfolio areas. There are also considerable variations between and within State and Territory areas of portfolio responsibility. This is particularly evident in the areas of school education, preschool education, early intervention and the regulatory environments for ECEC. Although the report outlines the broad parameters of the variations which exist, it has not been possible to include a detailed account of each State and Territory approach to ECEC, nor the specific apportionment of funds across all relevant programs.

At the same time the Australian ECEC system is in a period of transition as jurisdictions re-evaluate and reconceptualise existing policy frameworks and approaches, within a period of macro- and micro-economic reform. Like many other nations, Australia is at a crossroads, reflecting both the evolution of ECEC services and the changes that are occurring demographically, socially and economically. This report strives to capture both the complexity and the dynamic of ECEC in Australia at the turn of the century.

Preparation of the Report

The preparation of this report involved collaborative and consultative processes. Two major approaches were used in completing this report.

The first involved location and collation of existing sources of relevant material. Much of this material was already available to the project team through their current research, teaching and community involvement programs or was provided to the team by Commonwealth, State and Territory Government agencies or other ECEC organisations. A thorough review of existing information was undertaken to ensure that the available information was comprehensive and contemporary, and to identify any gaps.

To complement the information derived from existing sources, State and Territory visits were undertaken to confirm the currency of the information already available, to identify initiatives, to document recent changes in policy and service delivery approaches and to provide a deeper understanding of unique regional characteristics. Such visits also added to the team's understanding of the nature and extent of future developments in policy and practice, as perceived by the informants.

Face-to-face consultations were undertaken in every State and Territory, and with the Commonwealth, to ensure that a range of perspectives from the early childhood sector were available to provide a comprehensive national response. Consultations also explored the congruence between current policies and provisions and possible future directions of Australian services for young children and their families.

In the light of the variation in early childhood policy and service provision between and within each State and Territory, it was regarded as essential that the Background Report reflect both the commonality and diversity that characterise the field. Where possible, rural, regional and cultural perspectives have been included in the formulation of the Report.

Steering Committee involvement

To facilitate the project, the Commonwealth (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Department of Family and Community Services) established a Steering Committee, with senior policy personnel from the Commonwealth and State Governments and an Indigenous representative. The project team met with the Steering Committee on three occasions to plan the project and review the accuracy, currency and comprehensiveness of the drafts of the report. Members of the Steering Committee also provided information relevant to their jurisdictions and detailed feedback on the evolving draft.

Overview

The Australian Background Report addresses the key questions that are the focus of the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care. The Report is organised in the following sections.

Existing Forms and Definitions

This section provides an overview of the existing forms and definitions of ECEC provision in Australia.

Section 1: Context

In addition to providing general background information about Australia, this section gives an overview of Australia's system of government and its demography.

Section 2: Australian Early Childhood Education and Care

The development of ECEC is described in this section, focusing particularly on the historical foundations and features of current policy and provision.

Section 3: Policy Concerns

This section focuses on quality, access, supply, affordability, access by communities with special needs and current coverage.

Section 4: Policy Approaches

Major policy approaches are discussed in this section including: the regulation of care and education; quality assurance and standard setting; staffing requirements and training; family engagement and support; and funding and financing.

Section 5: Evaluation and Research

After discussing the characteristics of evaluation in ECEC, Section 5 describes the history of research in ECEC within Australia and discusses some current issues and recent initiatives in research.

Section 6: Concluding Comments and Assessments

The final section summarises the major themes emerging from the report, and provides a brief outline of the current state of ECEC. It concludes with an overview of some of the problems and prospects facing Australian ECEC.

Australian Early Childhood Education and Care – Existing Forms and Definitions

Within Australia, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services for children below school age are usually referred to as ‘child care’, ‘children’s services’ or ‘early childhood services’.

For the purposes of this report and for consistency with the OECD terminology, the term ECEC services shall be used to include both the range of formal care and education services for children under school age and in the early years of school.

The specific services which make up ECEC provision in Australia are as follows:

Family Day Care (FDC). FDC provides home based care for children aged 0–12 years. Care is provided by registered caregivers within the carer’s home. Local FDC coordination units oversee the placement of children, recruit and resource caregivers. (In South Australia FDC is sponsored by the State Department of Education Training and Employment).

Home Based Care. Home based carers look after other people’s children in their (the carer’s) own homes for payment. They are not attached to a family day care scheme. In some States and Territories, home based care may be regulated depending upon the number of children cared for. Where such care is unregulated it is part of the registered (informal) care sector.

Long Day Care Centres (LDC). LDC centres primarily cater to children from birth to school age. They are open for at least eight hours a day, five days a week and 48 weeks/year.

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS). MACS cater to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children aged 0–12 years and are managed by the local ATSI community. MACS provide a range of different services according to the needs of their community.

Multifunctional Children’s Services (MCS). MCS cater to children 0–12 years in rural areas² and offer a range of different types of care and education according to the needs of their community. Services offered may include, for instance, long day care, outside school hours care and family day care.

Mobile Children’s Services (Mobiles). Mobiles are travelling resource units which cater to families in rural and remote areas. Mobiles may offer a range of services including child care and preschool, as well as activities for older children, playgroups and toy libraries. The types of services offered vary according to community needs.

Occasional Care Centres (OCC). OCC cater to children birth to school age. They provide short-term care on a regular or irregular basis. Hours and days of operation vary from service to service.

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC). OSHC provides activities for children aged 5–12 years before and after school hours and during school vacations.

Playgroups. Playgroups provide activities for families with children aged birth to school age. Playgroups are usually attended by children in the company of their parents (or carers).

Preschools. Preschools generally cater to children aged 3?5 years. They are usually open only during school terms and most commonly during the hours 9 am to 3 pm. Children may attend on a half day or full day basis (with each half-day equivalent to one session of preschool). Preschools may also be referred to as kindergartens or pre-primary.

There are variations among States and Territories regarding the age range of children attending preschool, hours of operation, location and management of programs.

Registered care. Under registered (informal) care, carers such as relatives, friends, home based carers and nannies are registered with the Family Assistance Office. Registration does not play a regulatory role. It enables eligible parents paying for such care to claim a rebate toward the cost of care from the Commonwealth Government.

Schools. School education is compulsory for all children over the age of six years. Distance education programs cater to the educational needs of children in geographically isolated areas. Children attend school for up to 6 hours per day, with some variation in hours and the lengths of school terms around the country and between the government and non-government sectors.

The age of commencement of school varies between States and Territories. In general, the age of compulsory attendance is six with children being able to commence school sometime during their fifth year. In most cases, when children enrol at age 5, they enrol in a preparatory year. (Preschool refers to a sessional program which runs before this preparatory year and may or may not be connected to a particular school depending upon jurisdiction and location.) (Please refer to Table 1 in Appendix A.³)

Toy Libraries. Toy libraries have toys and games available for borrowing by parents and/or other children's services. The equipment is usually selected to assist children's development. Some toy libraries are specifically targeted to children with special needs or to rural and remote areas via mobile services.

Endnotes

1. A list of the organisations that took part in the consultation in every State and Territory is provided in Appendix E.
2. A rural area is defined as an area outside of bounded localities (populations of 200-999), other urban centres (populations of 1,000-99,999) and major urban centres (populations of 100,000 and over).
3. Appendix A contains all tables to be read in conjunction with this Report.

Section 1: Context

General Information about Australia

1.1 Background to Australian Government

Australia has a federal system of government with power and responsibilities shared between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The establishment of a federation in 1901 came over a century after initial European settlement. Prior to Federation each State was self-governing. Today, the assertion of State rights is still a strong theme in Australian politics.

There are six State Governments (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia) and two Territory Governments (the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory). The powers of Commonwealth and State Governments are determined by the Australian Constitution and each level of government has different areas of responsibility.

Under the Constitution, the Commonwealth is granted specified powers. State Governments have those powers not specified by the Constitution (residual powers). In relation to ECEC, and in very general terms, the Commonwealth has responsibility for social security whilst state governments have primary responsibility for education. Thus policy and funding matters related to different forms of ECEC services rest with different tiers of government.

There is also an additional tier of government, local government, which is established and regulated by State and Territory parliaments. Australia has about 750 local government councils. The functions of these councils vary but in general include responsibility for town planning, roads, streets and bridges, waste and sanitation services and community recreation facilities. Many, though not all, local governments in Australia are involved in the provision of ECEC.

As a result of this division of powers and responsibilities there are variations in ECEC provision between States and Territories.

1.2 Demographic Context

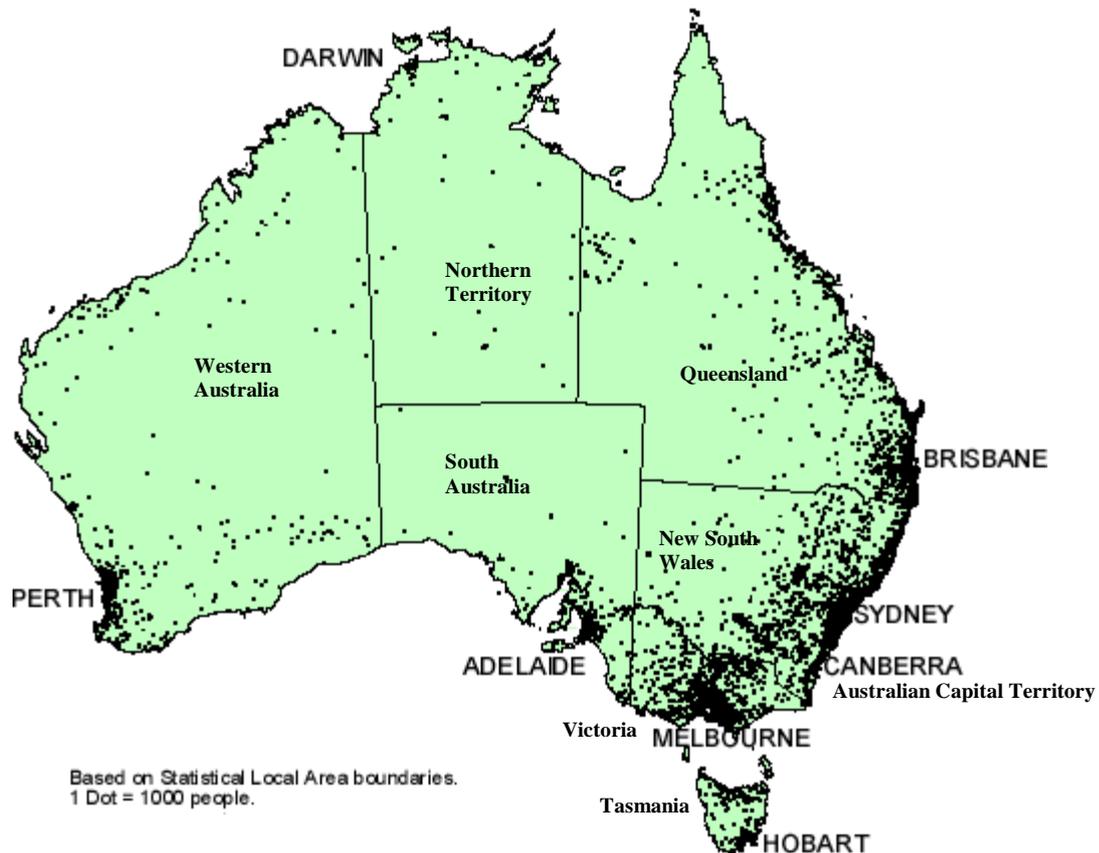
Contemporary Australia is a diverse, multicultural society of 19 million inhabitants living on a continent with a land area (7.72 million km²) that is only slightly smaller than the coterminous states of the United States of America (7.82 million km²). Australia's population has shown a steady increase in recent years of approximately 1% per year, comparable to the growth rate in the United States of America, New Zealand, Thailand, China and Indonesia. The most recent rise has largely been as a result of overseas migration which increased by 22% from 1997 to 1998.

1.2.1 Regional Differences

Most of Australia's population is concentrated in urban areas, particularly on the South East and East Coast, and to a lesser extent, in the South West of the continent, with the majority of Australians living in the capital cities of the States and Territories. The discrepancies in population density are marked, with half of the total land area of the continent as home to only

0.3% of the population. Vast distances separate many pockets of population in rural areas. In contrast, the most densely populated 1% of the continent contains 84% of the population. As higher population densities tend to allow for better service provision the question of how best to provide ECEC to families in rural and remote areas is an issue throughout Australia. The following map, Figure 1, illustrates the disparate distribution of population across the continent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000c).

Figure 1: Population Distribution, Australia–1998



Source: Regional Population Growth, Australia 1998 (3218.0)

New South Wales is the most populous state (6.34 million inhabitants at June, 1998) while Queensland (3.5 million) showed the highest population growth rate (11.1%) over the five-year period from 1993–98. Internal migration is the major factor contributing to change in the distribution of Australia’s population around the nation. In the five years to 1998, only Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia showed net gains as a result of interstate migration, while Tasmania showed the highest net loss of population from interstate migration. Brisbane, Darwin and Perth had the fastest rates of total population increase in the five years from 1993 to 1998. The inner city areas of Sydney and Melbourne have recently shown rapid population growth as a result of relocation of young people to these areas (ABS, 2000c).

Rural and remote Australia is experiencing a particular set of difficulties. The fastest decline in population has occurred in the rural areas of the nation, reflecting the impact of social, economic, technological and industrial changes that have had significant local impacts. Seven of the ten Local Government Areas showing the fastest rate of population decline have been in mining districts (six of these in Western Australia). The changes in population distribution over recent years reflect a trend that has been underway since the early part of the last century. In

1911, rural areas contained 43% of the total population. Today around 14% of the population lives in rural Australia.

In addition to population decline, many rural districts are facing high levels of unemployment, and higher than average poverty and disadvantage. Usually such communities are reliant upon private transport and have limited public transport both within and between communities. Although free school buses are provided to transport children to school, children often have to travel long distances, and parents may have a long distance to travel if they wish their children to attend any ECEC setting other than school. Low population densities result in a limited choice of services and associated facilities such as access to early intervention.

Although broad parallels can be drawn between urban and rural conditions wherever they are located, it is important to recognise that each State and Territory faces its own unique set of circumstances. For instance: the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Indigenous children in Australia (ABS, 1999), is less urbanised than the rest of Australia, has a highly scattered population, and population turnover is very high; and Tasmania faces high unemployment and a declining population as people move to the mainland in search of work. Therefore, it is important to understand that some differences in the provision of ECEC services arise from the specific circumstances of diverse communities.

1.2.2 Cultural and Social Diversity

The multicultural character of contemporary Australia is reflected in the most recent census that recorded that 3.9 million residents had been born overseas in one of 200 countries. A further 3.8 million Australians had one or both parents born overseas. In Australia currently 282 major languages (including 170 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) languages) are spoken and 92 religious denominations are represented.

The Indigenous population of Australia was approximately 352,970 in 1996 (or around 2% of the total population). Estimates of the population prior to European settlement in 1788 range from 300,000 to 1 million. Following European settlement, there was a marked decline in the Indigenous population as a result of the introduction of new diseases and the impact of dispossession. The Indigenous population has a younger age profile than the total population. Unlike the non-Indigenous population, 40% of the Indigenous population are aged under 15 years and only 3% are aged over 65. Current life expectancy is 57 years for men and 62 years for women, nearly 20 years less than for the rest of the population (ABS, 2000b).

Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in rural locations than the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2000b), although their distribution varies considerably across the continent. At the time of the last census, the most urbanised Indigenous populations were in Victoria and South Australia. The least urbanised were in Queensland and the Northern Territory (ABS, 1999).

At the last census, 21% of Indigenous persons aged 5 years and over spoke an ATSI language. Most Indigenous language speakers are concentrated in the north and west of Australia.

Indigenous people are less likely than other Australians to be attending an educational institution full-time. Of those who attend school, over 8% of students attended Aboriginal independent schools while 87% went to government schools (ABS, 1996). They are also less likely to have opportunities to participate in preschool education and they show significantly lower rates of literacy and numeracy skill development before leaving primary school. Indigenous Australians have more than double the unemployment rate of the general population (ABS, 1996).

Many Indigenous children experience hearing difficulties, as well as a range of other health and nutrition problems, that can affect learning. In Aboriginal communities an added challenge is to ensure that ECEC services are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and responsive to particular community contexts.

While the health of Australians generally is improving, there is a significant disparity between the health of the general population and the health of those Australians living in disadvantaged circumstances (Department of Health and Aged Care, 1999). In fact, the socio-economic gap between Australians has increased in the period since the publication in 1975–76 of the reports of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen, 1998).

1.2.3 Age Distribution of the Population

Consistent with other OECD countries, Australia has experienced considerable change in the age distribution of its population. In 1901, at the time of establishment of the Federation, 37% of the population was aged under 15 years and only 4% were over 65 years. By 1998 the population under 15 had dropped to 21% while the population aged over 65 had increased to 12%.

1.2.4 Changes in Australian Families

The availability and utilisation of early childhood care and education are related in complex ways to demographic trends in fertility, family size, family type, parental education level, workforce patterns, family mobility and life expectancy. Decisions about family formation and workforce participation are interrelated.

The average size of Australian households has been falling steadily across the last 20 years. In 1976, 60% of families were comprised of couples with children. By 1996 this group had dropped to 50% of the 7 million households in the nation. The proportion of one-parent families is increasing, but the major component of the overall change is the rise in the proportion of couple-only families. Australians are delaying having children and are living longer, resulting in an increased time in couple-only families both prior to having children and after their children leave home.

Following a rise in the Australian Total Fertility Rate to 3.6 children per woman from 1948 to 1961 (the “baby-boom” years), the rate has been declining to reach its lowest recorded level, of 1.74, in 1998. The rate varies considerably by educational level and geographic area, although the trend is to a decline across all social groups, reflecting the delay of family formation and the increase in the percentage of women remaining childless. Assuming the trend in fertility continues and total migration remains at its current level, these trends would translate into a drop of between 5% to 7% in the population of children over the next decade (McDonald, 1999a).

Along with these trends in the fertility rate, the distribution of Australian family types has also been changing, with a steady increase in the percentage of single parent families. In 1974, for example, only 9.4% of families with dependent children were classified as one-parent families. By 1998 this figure has risen to 21.5%. The major determinant of this trend has been the increasing rate of parental relationship breakdown.

There has been a decrease in the number of couples marrying, particularly in the younger age groups. The percentage of women having married by the age of 25 had declined from 83% in 1972 to 47% in 1991. Almost half of the couples who marry for the first time have chosen to live together prior to marrying.

Women, on average, are waiting longer to have their first child, and are having fewer children. The percentage of women who had a child by age 24 years has fallen from 67% in 1971 to 25% in 1991. Nearly one in three children are born to women over 30 years old. Many women are now choosing to remain childless (27% of women aged 40 remain childless).

1.2.5 Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment

Currently, 8,970,700 Australians are employed with a national employment participation rate of 63.6%. After peaking at 946,800 in September 1993, unemployment fell rapidly to 751,900 by June 1995, rose slightly for two years and has been falling steadily since 1997. Figures for the March quarter of 2000 show a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 6.9% (ABS, 2000d).

The major trend in employment in recent years has been an increase in the number of casual employees, with the most recent data showing 26.9% of the workforce in casual employment. Women still have a higher likelihood of being employed on a casual basis, although an increasing number of males now find themselves in casual employment.

A wider polarisation of the labour market has occurred in recent years, with many Australians working less than the “standard” working week of 35–44 hours at the same time as there has been an increase in those working more than 45 hours. In 1998–99, however, the increase in the proportion of those working more than 45 hours was greater than the rise in the proportion working less than 35 hours (Healy, 2000). Working hours are also changing in terms of greater flexibility in starting and finishing times; increased span of hours; averaging of hours over a week, month or year; staggered start and finish times; flexible working time arrangements; changes to rostered days off; flexibility in rest and meal breaks; and changes to shift work provision.

It is now difficult to talk of standard working arrangements, as Australians are increasingly likely to be involved in a range of employment types, including permanent full-time or part-time, as well as casual full-time or part-time work. There has also been growth in “non-standard” employment types, including self-employment, agency employment, consultancy contracts, atypical contracts with more than one employer, independent contractor arrangements and seasonal work. The range of parental working patterns to be accommodated by ECEC, their flexibility and unpredictability now present much more complexity than even a decade ago. The trend to lengthening of the average working week will have far-reaching implications for ECEC.

1.2.6 Workforce Participation of Women

Approximately 70% of women are in some kind of paid employment, either part time or full time and women account for approximately 43% of the paid workforce. In 1997 nearly half (49%) of mothers with children under 4 years of age worked. Despite the increased workforce participation of women, women with family responsibilities are still shouldering a disproportionate responsibility for cooking, cleaning and other household work (Bittman & Pixley, 1997).

The rate of participation of women in the workforce is influenced by their relationship status, the age of the youngest child and the cost and availability of child care (McDonald, 1999a & b). Those with a partner are more likely to be employed (62%) than those who are lone parents (51%) (Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, 1999). The stage of the lifecycle has a major impact on many aspects of family life. In terms of employment, the workforce participation of women with children is related to the age of their children. Of women in couple families with children under 15 years of age, as at April, 1997, 24% were in full time employment, 34% worked part time, 4% were unemployed and 38% were not in the workforce.

For women in couple families, workforce participation rates vary considerably with the age of the youngest child. The lowest participation rate was for those whose youngest child was less than three years old (47%) while the highest participation rate was for those with children in the range 12–14 years (79%). The proportion of those in full-time employment also mirrors these trends, with the lowest rate for those with children under three years old (14%) and the highest for those with a youngest child in the range 12–14 years (40%). Similar trends were evident for female lone parents. Those with a child under three years of age were less likely to be employed (28%) than those with a child aged 12–14 years (65%). Only 7% of female lone parents with a child under 3 were in full-time paid employment compared to 31% with a child aged 12–14 years.

Section 2: Australian Early Childhood Education and Care

2.1 Historical Overview

A brief examination of the history of ECEC in Australia provides an insight into the complexities and characteristics of Australian ECEC in the present day. The following discussion provides an overview of major themes in the development of Australian ECEC.

By the end of the 1890s, the influence of educational thinkers such as Froebel and Pestalozzi as well as the associated development of kindergarten movements in Europe and the United States, were making their mark in Australia. Women such as Maybanke Anderson in New South Wales and Lillian de Lissa in South Australia, among others, led the movement to pioneer ECEC in Australia. Up until this time, Australia had some fee-charging kindergartens, mostly attached to private schools for the daughters of wealthy families, whilst children in working class and poor communities had limited options. Sometimes the latter were sent to school with their older siblings, despite the fact that most schools did not provide classes for them. Many others were left to look after themselves while their parents worked and thus became latchkey children, or children spending much of their time roaming the streets.

As a response to such conditions a philanthropic kindergarten movement emerged in 1895 with the formation of the Kindergarten Union of New South Wales. By 1911, similar organisations had been formed in every State in Australia. The kindergarten movement advocated for the introduction of kindergarten principles into schools and the establishment of free kindergartens in poor suburbs (Brennan, 1998). The kindergarten was regarded as a tool for urban social reform as well as educational reform (Spearitt, 1979; Brennan, 1998). This drive for reform, however, was primarily concerned with the education and socialisation of young children rather than the provision of support to working mothers. Most kindergartens opened only between 9 am–12 noon, and only admitted children from three years of age. Many kindergarten supporters viewed full day care as undesirable.

In response to the plight of employed mothers from the working class, the Day Nursery movement emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Day Nurseries opened for longer hours (7 am–6 pm) and would admit children from infancy. Whereas the kindergarten movement emphasised teacher training (and established its own teaching colleges), Day Nurseries emphasised physical health and well-being and were initially staffed by nurses (Spearitt, 1979; Brennan, 1998). The development of two such distinct movements was indicative of a perceived split between care and education. This dichotomy has resonated through many of the ensuing debates and policy initiatives which have shaped ECEC provision in Australia, and reflects similar debates in other countries.

For many years the establishment and management of kindergartens and day nurseries remained largely a philanthropic concern. In 1938, the Commonwealth became involved in the provision of early childhood facilities, albeit in a limited fashion, with the funding of one demonstration child education and health centre in each capital city – the Lady Gowrie Child Centres (Brennan, 1998). These centres were concerned mainly with the children of underprivileged families.

After the Second World War, middle class families became interested in kindergartens for their children. During the 1940s and 1950s preschools, as they became known, began to emerge in middle class suburbs and were often managed by local parents. During the 1960s and 1970s,

some State Governments became involved in the provision of preschool services. The Tasmanian Government incorporated preschools into its Education Department. The Western Australian Government established the preprimary program and took over the running of preschools. The Queensland Government became involved in preschool provision and began to establish preschools in conjunction with primary schools. In both Victoria and New South Wales preschool provision remained largely in the hands of voluntary agencies (Brennan, 1998).

Although preschool provision and utilisation were widespread, preschools largely failed to meet the needs of working mothers. A strong push for the provision of child care services to support working women developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A coalescing of feminist advocacy for women's right to seek and remain in paid employment, research on the number of children left without adequate supervision because of their parents' need to work, and the needs of industry (particularly manufacturing) for access to women's labour (women being less expensive to employ than men) became a powerful impetus for governments to take child care provision seriously. As a result, the Commonwealth Minister for Labour and National Service introduced the *Child Care Act 1972*, which commenced Commonwealth involvement in the funding of child care programs beyond the Lady Gowrie Centres. The Act emphasised the importance of good quality care to meet children's developmental needs at a cost parents could afford. As a result, initial funding was provided for the employment of preschool teachers and nurses. Over the years the focus shifted more explicitly toward supporting workforce participation and this was reflected in changes in funding. Today the Child Care Act sits under the auspice of the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Its location within this portfolio is indicative of its primary objectives being related to issues of employment and family support rather than education which is regarded as largely the responsibility of State and Territory Governments.

Since its inception as a broad Commonwealth program, children's services policy has been subject to many governmental reviews and has experienced many significant changes in its thirty year history. These reviews have canvassed questions around where responsibility for young children should sit, what types of out-of-home care and education settings should be supported, and who should bear the cost. Children's services policy has been located within a number of different portfolios, and different types of ECEC services have been targeted for expansion at different times.

Under the Commonwealth Labor Government of 1983–1990 child care provision was regarded as part of the social wage (government-provided benefits and services). The Government agreed to increases in the social wage in exchange for unions exercising wage restraint. There was an emphasis on increasing the number of child care places available and expenditure on child care was increased. New services were allocated to areas based on assessed need. The expansion of the child care sector was reliant upon the cooperation of state, territory and local governments which provided capital funding, blocks of land and input to the planning of services. Direct funding for child care services and fee subsidies for parents were only available to non-profit services. These tended to be managed by parent associations, church groups, organisations such as the Kindergarten Union, and local government.

As the number of places increased and more children spent greater amounts of time in ECEC, attention shifted to the quality of children's experiences in such settings. As a result, during the late eighties many early childhood professional groups, unions, parents and others began lobbying for the introduction of an accreditation system similar to that of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States.

In 1990 the Commonwealth Labor Government extended the availability of fee subsidies to families using for-profit services. This policy shift was designed to curtail the government's capital expenditure on establishing new services, to stimulate investment in child care from the

private sector, and to provide some equity to parents using private child care. This move was not without its critics who were concerned about the impact of the profit motive on the provision of care for young children. This concern, coupled with the ongoing lobby for an accreditation system, became an impetus for the introduction of what was to become the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day care centres in 1994. As a result, eligibility to receive a fee subsidy for long day care is now tied to the participation of the centre in the accreditation process.

The current Commonwealth Coalition Government introduced a further policy shift when it removed direct services subsidies, known as operational subsidies, to non-profit long day care and outside school hours care. Today Australia relies upon a mix of for-profit and non-profit ECEC services. This is particularly so in the provision of centre-based long day care where there has been a trend toward subsidising families rather than direct government support to services. The trend to more private sector involvement in provision of services is likely to continue with a recent announcement that from January 2001, new places for family day care and outside school hours care will be open to the private sector.

An appreciation of the history of formal education in Australia needs to be understood within the context of the massive social experiment that was conducted by the British Government toward the end of the 18th century when it founded a penal colony in New South Wales. One of the most significant tasks of the colonial administrators was to reform the “criminal classes” and education came to be seen as the most efficacious means by which this might be achieved. Throughout the 19th century, the primary aim of schooling was the “moral edification” of the youth of the Australian colonies. The imperatives for social reform and cohesion, universal provision of schooling for a population increasingly dispersed around a massive land mass, and administrative efficiency could only be realised by a centralised, state-run structure. By the time of Federation in 1901, each of the Australian States had a centralised government school system providing an efficient, compulsory, secular and free education for the colonists. School attendance and literacy rates were among the highest in the world.

A second characteristic of Australian education has been the involvement of various Christian churches in the provision of schools. By the beginning of the 19th century, the colonial administration had established schools for Aboriginal and orphan children. These schools were run in close alliance with the Church of England (now the Anglican Church of Australia). Until the mid 1870s the state provided material support to churches to run schools, but bitterness between the state and the Catholic Church contributed to the end of all state-aid in each of the colonies by the early 1880s. While only a few of the schools run by the various Protestant churches survived after 1880, extensive recruitment of religious teaching orders from France and Ireland saw the number of Catholic schools increase as these teachers survived on the charity of the local parishes. Church-run schools were not part of the “public system”.

Despite not having any Constitutional obligation to fund school education, the Commonwealth Government began to fund both government and non-government schools in the early 1960s in response to the demands of the non-government school sector and the State-run schools, both of which were in a state of crisis due to the educational demands of the post-war baby-boom. By the 1970s, all the State Governments had followed the lead of the Commonwealth Government and were once more providing material assistance to non-government schools.

As the costs of education rise, ideas regarding the role of government in the provision of services are revised and the rights of parents and students to make choices about their education are given effect, the funding of education in Australia has become increasingly complex. The following examples are indicative of this complexity. Public schools in most States levy a form of fees on parents, either as a voluntary contribution, or as a compulsory fee for materials and services as is the case in South Australia. The costs of early childhood education are born by local, State and Commonwealth Governments, parents and charities; while the costs of higher

education are borne predominantly by the Commonwealth and State Governments with students and the private sector paying a proportion of the costs through various fee systems and sponsorships/partnerships respectively.

While the Constitution enshrines the rights of the States to govern education, the massive investment in education at all levels by the Commonwealth Government has seen it exert considerable influence over the direction of education. From the mid 1980s there have been numerous attempts at national co-ordination of school curriculum. Further, through targeted funding, the Commonwealth has ensured that matters of national importance, such as vocational education, literacy, numeracy, retention rates for post-compulsory schooling and various equity issues are high on the education agenda in Australia.

One of the distinctive features of the Australian school system is the mix of school providers: Government, Catholic and Independent schools. In Australia, approximately 30% of all school-aged children today attend non-government schools. Approximately 10% attend private schools with the remaining 20% attending Catholic systemic (district) schools. Australia now has considerable diversity within and across school systems and this diversity reflects both the diversity of multicultural Australia and the wishes of parents to choose an appropriate education for their children.

2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of ECEC Today

The philosophies which underpin the development and implementation of early childhood programs are evident in a number of different ways. For instance, at a governmental level, they may be evident in the policy statements from which governments establish the direction of relevant programs; the portfolio areas under which ECEC programs fall; the purposes for which monitoring and regulatory mechanisms are established; and the way in which services are supported.

An examination of the development and direction of ECEC in Australia reveals a range of beliefs and policy directions regarding its purpose. Its establishment and provision can vary according to government philosophy, jurisdiction (i.e. the government department with responsibility in that area), type of setting and community perception. The clearest delineation lies between preschools and schools on the one hand, and on the other, the remaining settings for children under five. Preschools and schools are widely perceived to be educational in their primary focus. School education is universally available, and most States and Territories aim for universal provision of preschool education in one form or another. However, the perceptions and policy directions of non-preschool settings catering to children under five reveal a multiplicity of purposes.

The establishment and maintenance of a national child care program has been linked to economic policy, to family policy and latterly to education policy. An explicitly defined and primary focus upon children is only just beginning to emerge and then only in some jurisdictions. To date, the provision of out-of-home care has been regarded primarily as a means of:

- ~~///~~ enabling parents to participate in the paid workforce and, to a lesser extent, in the broader community;
- ~~///~~ providing respite for either parents or children; and
- ~~///~~ supporting families at risk.

More recently, particularly with the advent of accreditation in long day care centres, government attention has shifted to the role child care has in providing opportunities for children's development, learning and socialisation. Emerging concerns regarding the

development of literacy and numeracy skills and a desire to enhance later educational outcomes for children, have focused additional attention on the role of such ECEC settings. However, the focus upon children themselves, in many instances, is a subset of the broader overarching policy whether it relates to employment, families or specific educational outcomes. At the same time, there have been recent State and Territory initiatives to establish policy frameworks which recognise the integrated nature of early childhood education and care.

Thus a variety of fundamental principles and concerns underlie the policy approaches of government departments to ECEC. This mix of approaches is reflected in the variety of service types; the way in which funding is targeted—both in relation to parents and to services; program staffing requirements; and program content and structure.

2.3 Current Provision of ECEC

A range of services exist for children and their families. This diversity reflects, to some extent, the different needs of families. Long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services have been supported by governments primarily to meet the needs of working parents, although they are also used by non-working parents and to provide respite for families. Preschools are oriented to providing sessional educational experiences for children before they enter school. Occasional care services provide limited casual care for the children of parents at home. In recent years the boundaries between such services have been blurring and many jurisdictions are working to diminish the divisions between service types. Broad distinctions, however, do remain and may be entrenched by different funding arrangements and different regulatory environments.

ECEC services are also diverse in terms of where they are sited. Long day care centres and family day care schemes may be neighbourhood-based, work-based or located in the work area. Outside school hours care is often attached to schools, but may also exist in other locations such as neighbourhood centres. Similarly, preschools may be located within school, co-located on the same site as a school or long day care centre, exist as a stand alone service, or be an integrated program within a long day care centre. Occasional care services may be located in neighbourhood halls, shopping centres or as stand alone services in neighbourhoods.

The provision of such facilities occurs through a mixture of public, non-government not-for-profit, private for-profit, and private not-for-profit organisations. Most centre-based long day care is provided by the private sector (73%), although most other ECEC services are provided by State Governments, local government and the non-profit sector.

School education is universally available for students of compulsory school age. State Governments are required to ensure the provision of schooling to all children of school age. Schooling is delivered through both government and non-government (Catholic and independent) providers. In 1998 there were over 6,746 primary schools comprising 70.4% of schools in Australia and a further 10% of schools were combined primary and secondary schools (which include the K–2 years) (MCEETYA, 1998). Of these, 72.5% were government schools, 17.4% were Catholic schools and 10.1% were Independent schools

Within States, Ministers, government departments, statutory authorities, non-government school education authorities and individual schools (particularly in the case of independent schools) variously determine policies and practices on such matters as curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment, resource allocation and utilisation, as well as teacher employment and professional development.

Responsibility for children's services and education policy in Australia involves all levels of government.

2.3.1 The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth departments with major responsibility for ECEC are the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

The Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). FaCS has major responsibility for family programs and ECEC excluding schools and preschools. It is responsible for the administration of the *Child Care Act 1972* and for policy related to income support for families. From 1 July 2000 the *Family Assistance Act 1999* will partially replace the *Child Care Act*.

Through its Child Care Program, FaCS is concerned with policy and funding in relation to long day care services (including family day care); multifunctional services and multifunctional Aboriginal services; some occasional care centres; and outside school hours care. Subsidies are also provided to central playgroup associations in each State to facilitate the development of playgroups.

In addition, funding is made available for the provision of support, advice and training to the staff and management of services under the Child Care Program. Historically, ongoing funding has been provided to specialist training agencies, however funding is increasingly subject to tender. A proportion of on-going funding is directed to support and train agencies which facilitate the integration of children with special needs.

The objective of the Program is “to assist families with dependent children to participate in the workforce and the general community by supporting the provision of affordable quality child care”. Implicit in this statement is a focus on parents’ needs, particularly in relation to workforce participation. This link between workforce participation and the Commonwealth funding of children’s services has been strong throughout the history of the Child Care Program since the 1970s. Access to a child care place is not regarded as a right.

In terms of focusing upon children’s needs, the Commonwealth requires that the services under the Child Care Program comply with State and Territory regulations, where these apply. Long day care centres must also participate in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System if families using them are to be eligible for fee assistance.

The Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council (CCCAC) is a ministerially-appointed council which provides advice to the Minister of Family and Community Services on child care issues.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) is a ministerially-appointed council which oversees the Quality Improvement and Accreditation (QIAS) process for long day care. Support staff are employed to provide advice to long day care centres on accreditation matters and to coordinate the accreditation system.

The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). DETYA is responsible for administering Commonwealth policies and programs for schools and provides financial assistance to State and Territory Government school education authorities, non-government school authorities and non-government schools. Funding is provided for the provision of schooling, special purpose targeted programs and to support national priorities and strategies. Commonwealth policies in education are developed in the context of the role schools can play in the attainment of national economic and social goals. DETYA has a significant role in Indigenous education, including preschool education for Indigenous students.

DETYA goals with particular relevance for early childhood policy and practice are the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills for all school students, particularly given the

impact of early literacy experiences on subsequent achievement at school; and the improvement of educational outcomes for Indigenous students. In relation to the latter, DETYA is directly involved in increasing the participation rate of Indigenous children in preschool education, as a strategy toward facilitating later student success at primary school.

2.3.2 State and Territory Governments

State and Territory Governments are primarily responsible for policy and funding in relation to preschools, schools, and some occasional care centres. Some also elect to contribute financially to outside schools hours care, playgroups, long day care and other children's services.

Regulations governing ECEC services are formulated and administered at this level of government. These responsibilities are largely carried out by education departments and/or departments of community services and health. Each State and Territory sets its own priorities in relation to ECEC funding and regulation.

In terms of the involvement of State and Territory Governments, two distinct patterns are evident with regard to the legislative, funding and policy responsibilities for ECEC. The first is where responsibilities are split between education and community services; the second is where all ECEC comes under the one jurisdiction, usually education. Although similarities exist, each government is unique and variations exist between the underlying philosophies which drive policy, and the types of services regulated and funded.

The differences that exist between each State and Territory partially reflect the historical development of the sector in each and partially are a response to the ideological basis of each government. However, it is important to note also that some differences also reflect specific responses to distinct regional circumstances.

Most States and Territories are attempting to enhance the level of cooperation and understanding between departments and programs involved in ECEC and to provide better continuity between early childhood settings, particularly long day care, preschool and the early years of schooling. Many of these approaches are relatively new and their long term effectiveness has not yet been evaluated.

Australian Capital Territory

In the Australian Capital Territory responsibility for ECEC rests with the Department of Education and Community Services. The Australian Capital Territory is currently consulting on a draft three-year plan for preschools within the context of the range of ECEC services available. It explicitly places the best interest of the child as the primary consideration for all early childhood services.

New South Wales

In New South Wales the primary legislative, funding and policy responsibility for ECEC, other than school, rests with the Department of Community Services (DoCS), through its Office of Child Care. The Department of Education and Training (DET) is concerned with the school sector and preschools attached to schools.

The New South Wales Government has developed an explicitly child-centred policy framework for early childhood. This policy has been developed with reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and growing interest in the intrinsic value of the early childhood years.

Northern Territory

Territory Health Services is concerned with all formal ECEC services other than school and preschool. The latter come under the auspice of the Department of Education. Territory Health

Services focuses on early childhood in the context of child health and care with support for families. Territory Health and the Northern Territory Department of Education are currently collaborating to establish a ‘whole of government’ approach to the development and implementation of early childhood policy.

Queensland

The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland (FYCCQ) is concerned with all formal ECEC services other than schools and preschools. The latter come under the auspice of Education Queensland. Policy for ECEC services outside school lies within the context of meeting family needs.

South Australia

All ECEC services come under the responsibility of the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE). The Department aims to achieve an integrated childhood and schooling system with a strong focus on the importance of the early years and with explicit curriculum guidelines from birth.

Tasmania

Responsibility for all ECEC services now rests with the Department of Education. This has been a relatively recent move designed to facilitate linkages between schools and child care, to cater more comprehensively for children’s educational, care and welfare needs, and to improve the coordination of support for families.

Victoria

The Department of Human Services (DHS) takes responsibility for all ECEC other than school, including the funding of most preschools. The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) has responsibility for schools. Recent policy changes enable school councils to operate preschools, however, these are still funded and regulated by the DHS. DHS links ECEC with other services which support families with young children including maternal and child health services. It places the needs and best interest of the child in the context of the family as the key consideration of these services.

Western Australia

The Education Department of Western Australia provides a universal, free, kindergarten and pre-primary education service within an integrated school system. This system offers one part-time year and one full-time year of schooling before the compulsory school age. Family and Children’s Services (FCS) has responsibility for all ECEC services other than school and preschool. The focus of FCS is to promote “responsibility and growth in family and community life and contribute to the care and protection of children.”

2.3.3 Intergovernmental Committees

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). This council comprises the State, Territory, Commonwealth and New Zealand Ministers with responsibility in the relevant portfolio areas. It provides a forum for national collaboration in policy development and implementation in relation to schooling in the wider context of education and training, employment and youth culture.

The Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers (CESCEO). CESCEO consists of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of each State and Territory’s education system. The CEO of DETYA is usually invited to attend. Matters discussed at the meetings include pre-selection and in-service education of teachers, school human resources and industrial relations, curricula, special education, building programs, administrative procedures, MCEETYA issues (including literacy and numeracy benchmarks and VET in schools) and the extent of uniformity and diversity between education systems.

Underneath this council sits an Early Childhood Education Working Party which focuses on the broad range of education and care services for children from birth to eight. This working party is currently examining a range of factors which impact upon children's learning and later success, particularly in relation to literacy, numeracy and social outcomes.

The Community Services Ministers Conference. The Community Services Ministers Conference comprises the Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers with primary responsibility for community and family services. Meetings usually occur annually, with the purpose of promoting a consistent and coordinated approach to community services policy.

The Community Services Ministers Advisory Council (CSMAC). CSMAC's role is to implement the decisions of the aforementioned Ministers conference. It meets twice yearly and brings together representatives from State and Territory community services departments, the Commonwealth departments of Family and Community services and Health and Aged Care, the Department of Social Welfare in New Zealand, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

2.3.4 Local Government

Local governments are involved in the provision of a wide range of services which support families with young children. For instance, most local governments provide libraries, parks, recreation and sporting facilities. They may also provide immunisation services and parenting courses.

Many local governments (particularly in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania) are directly involved in the provision of ECEC facilities by sponsoring or managing long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours services. Large local governments will often employ a children's services coordinator and other specific staff to assist manage and resource children's services in their local area.

2.3.5 Non-Government, Non-Profit Organisations

The involvement of non-profit organisations in the provision of ECEC has its origins in the philanthropic early kindergarten movement. The ideals of community development and parent control of services embraced by this movement were predominant in the first two decades of the development of the modern children's services sector.

For many years, ECEC provision was reliant upon the non-profit sector and such providers continue to be involved. The non-profit sector is diverse and includes independently incorporated parent associations (which often run a single service), and larger sponsoring organisations such as the Uniting Church, KU Children's Services, SDN Children's Services and the Crèche and Kindergarten Association.

2.3.6 Private Sector

Two distinct providers can be identified in this sector: private for-profit businesses which tend to be involved in the provision of long day care centres and some outside schools hours services; and the private school sector, which operates on a non-profit basis.

Private providers of long day care and outside school hours care may be owner-operators running a single centre, or may be commercial providers involved in running a number of centres. The involvement of the private sector, particularly in long day care centres, has

increased in the past decade. Private sector investment in long day care has been concurrent with an ideological shift by successive Commonwealth Governments from funding service providers to funding consumers. Accompanying this has been a shift from the construction of child care as a community service, to child care as a business.

Non-government schools include schools with religious affiliations and others independent of such links. Recurrent funding to the non-government school sector is available from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. Schooling in the non-government sector also relies on significant income from other sources such as tuition fees. The conditions under which non-government schools can receive Commonwealth funding were relaxed in 1997. In 1998 of the 1,869,852 children attending primary schools, 26.8% were enrolled in non-government schools. There has been a gradual shift in enrolments towards non-government schools.

The presence of preschools and long day care centres attached to, and run by, private schools is a relatively new but distinct trend evident throughout Australia.

2.3.7 Employer Sponsored Child Care (ESCC)

Employer sponsored child care services were encouraged during the mid-1990s as part of the Commonwealth's response to its obligations under the International Labour Organisation Convention (ILO) 156. These operate on a non-profit basis. There are currently 65 ESCC services throughout Australia. In addition, employers may reserve places in existing settings for their employees. At the present time, there are an estimated 727 places reserved in centre-based services and 213 places reserved in Family day care (figures supplied by FaCS).

2.3.8 Statutory Bodies

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). AIFS is an independent statutory body which reports to the Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services. It conducts research and disseminates information on the social and economic factors which influence family functioning.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Studies (AIHWS). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is an independent health and welfare statistics and information agency within the Commonwealth Health and Aged Care portfolio. The Institute provides information and analysis on health and welfare issues in Australia.

2.3.9 Other Policy Initiatives

This section examines the impact of government policies that, although not directly related to ECEC, have an impact on the shape of ECEC provision. These policies include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC); the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156; and the National Competition Policy (NCP). The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* also has implications for ECEC.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). The Australian Government ratified the UNCROC in 1990 and subsequently became a signatory. Several States have used the Convention as a reference point for reviewing policy and legislation relating to children and young people, including the Acts which govern ECEC.

The Convention has also provided an impetus for the establishment of specific agencies, such as Commissioners for Children in some states, for instance, the Office for Children and Young

People (New South Wales), the Commissioner for Children (New South Wales), the Children's Commissioner (Queensland) and the Children's Interest Bureau (South Australia).

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 156: Workers with Family Responsibilities. When Australia ratified this Convention in 1990 it became an aim of national policy to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination.

National Competition Policy (NCP). The potential of the NCP to have an impact on several areas of ECEC for children under five, especially long day care centres, arises out of the development of a mixed economy in service provision and the resultant partial reorientation of this provision from community service to business.

The potential impact of NCP on ECEC is in several areas. First, the States and Territories are required to review legislation to assess whether it restricts competition. Under NCP, legislation should not restrict competition in the relevant market unless the benefits of the restriction outweigh the costs. To date, some jurisdictions have argued that benefits of legislation governing ECEC outweighs any restrictions these may place upon competition. The second impact is upon local government as elements of the private sector use NCP to lobby against local government administration of ECEC services. Although NCP does not prohibit any governments from subsidising community services if they decide there is a community benefit, many local government services are finding that their support to such services is being challenged. This is causing disruption in some municipalities, and some local governments are citing NCP as a reason for downgrading their involvement in the provision of early childhood services.

Disability Legislation. The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes it unlawful to discriminate in the provision of goods, services (including education) or facilities against people on the basis that they have, or may have, a disability.

Section 3: Policy Concerns

There are a number of current policy concerns facing the provision of ECEC in Australia. These include the appropriateness and effectiveness of quality assurance systems, the impact of a range of developments in the field on the capacity of ECEC settings to improve or maintain levels of quality, and the number of children who do not currently benefit from investment in ECEC. Access to appropriate services for all children with additional needs remains a concern of governments and service providers. For instance, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's Report *Emerging Themes: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* noted that in many areas of rural and remote Australia there is no access to preschool education and in a small number of remote Aboriginal communities there is no access to school. The impact of funding changes and privatisation in the long day care sector has been a subject of considerable debate within children's services as has the impact of National Competition Policy. Issues related to staff recruitment, retention and developments in training have also emerged as policy concerns. In addition, there has been an increasing focus upon the need to improve children's transitions to school and their transitions between ECEC environments.

The following section focuses predominantly on concerns related to quality, access and affordability and concludes with an overview of the current coverage of ECEC. Other issues identified as concerns are addressed in the remaining sections of the report as appropriate.

3.1 Quality

3.1.1 Conceptualising Quality

Recent debate has raised the need to recognise that definitions and measures of quality reflect particular social and cultural contexts and may not be considered universally applicable (see for instance, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). Nevertheless in the daily reality of ECEC provision there is a need and expectation that early childhood institutions will safeguard children's well-being, nurture their development and provide the highest possible quality of educational outcomes for all students. An understanding of the contextual nature of quality is a call for informed and reflective practice by early childhood practitioners.

Most discussions of quality in ECEC identify a variety of perspectives from which quality can be viewed: quality from the parent's perspective; the structural or contributing components of quality; and the process or determining components of quality. Quality may also take into account the child's perspective—for instance how happy the child is during the day, how stressful the day is for the child, or how the child experiences the ECEC program. A further impact upon the way in which quality is constructed and measured are the outcomes sought by ECEC programs.

It is important that discussions and evaluations of quality consider not only how individual services function, but also the way in which the different aspects of ECEC come together as a whole to meet the needs of children and families.

3.1.2 Measures of Quality

The extent to which formal mechanisms for measuring quality are in place varies according to the type of service and where the service is located.

In general however, two significant measures can be identified:

- ~~///~~ those which are concerned with the contributing (structural) components of quality; and
- ~~///~~ those which are concerned with determining (process) components of quality.

There is an interactive relationship between the two with the contributing components providing the foundation upon which quality can be built.

Contributing components refer to those quantifiable features, which once in place, are likely to facilitate good quality ECEC environments.

These include:

- ~~///~~ the qualifications required of staff;
- ~~///~~ numbers of qualified staff;
- ~~///~~ staff to child ratios; and
- ~~///~~ requirements regarding health, safety and physical space.

These are the types of issues covered by State and Territory child care regulations and education policy. Current regulatory requirements differ in each State and Territory in terms of both content and the types of services regulated.

In relation to schools, State Governments regulate schools, including non-government schools which are required to operate under conditions set by State Government registration authorities.

Determining components refer to those features which are concerned with the quality of the program actually experienced by the child during the day. These include:

- ~~///~~ the appropriateness of the program with regard to children's developmental stages, culture, individual development and characteristics;
- ~~///~~ the responsiveness of the environment to children's and families' individual needs and preferences;
- ~~///~~ the way in which staff interact with children and families;
- ~~///~~ the way children experience daily routines; and
- ~~///~~ the nature of the curriculum and how it is implemented.

In long day care centres these determining components are measured through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). No other national quality assessment tool has, as yet, been implemented, although quality assurance mechanisms are being developed for both family day care and outside school hours care.

Activities and programs to monitor and report on the quality of schooling outcomes are in place in all States and schooling sectors and at a national level, through the Annual National Report on Schooling.

Further discussion on QIAS occurs in the section on Overseeing Quality (Section 4.1. p.38).

3.1.3 Quality Concerns

The inputs for quality, in terms of regulatory requirements, are largely determined by the outcomes sought by government policy and the resources available for supporting ECEC. An emphasis on meeting parents' needs may focus primarily upon providing families with access to care rather than focussing upon children's developmental needs. An emphasis on care rather than education may result in less stringent staff qualification requirements. An emphasis on affordability for families can exert pressure for cost reduction which can have an impact upon quality. Differing concepts of education may have an impact upon the type of teaching qualifications preferred and the types of programs which are regarded as educational.

A divergence in the outcomes sought coupled with a limited resource base will inevitably lead to competing policy outcomes. This is reflected in debates about the appropriateness of quality inputs and measures, and concerns about the quality of aspects of service provision.

One such concern, infants in centre-based long day care, provides an example of these tensions. In such centres, the staff: child ratio specified for children aged under 2 years in most States and Territories is 1:5. Many early childhood educationalists, on the basis of research on social attachment and early brain development, dispute the appropriateness of this ratio, believing it insufficient to allow staff to interact effectively with each young child. Staff working with this age group often complain that the ratio creates a stressful environment in which to work. Further, unless the numbers of very young children exceed a specified limit (which ranges from 1:8 to 1:20 depending upon location) there is no requirement to employ trained staff. Resistance to increasing the numbers of staff to children and qualification requirements arises from the fact that higher numbers of staff to children and higher qualifications both cause the cost of service provision to rise. ECEC for children under two is an area of unmet demand because the cost of provision makes it a less attractive investment option than provision for 3 to 5 year-olds.

In addition, there are other issues which are raised as matters of concern regarding quality in non-school ECEC. These include the extent to which children may be experiencing multiple care arrangements; the increasing numbers of children attending long day care on a part-time basis resulting in changing cohorts of children across the week as well as pressure on staff in programming for increased and variable numbers of children; the extent to which families may be relying upon unregulated care; and issues related to staff recruitment and retention.

Policy foci on the enhancement of literacy and numeracy skills for all school students, particularly in the early years, and the improvement of school retention and participation rates and outcomes for Indigenous students are major contemporary concerns for schooling. Recent literacy testing results have shown that nationally 86.9% of Australian year 3 students achieved the agreed minimum standard for reading. The figures suggest that literacy problems are more severe for boys than for girls with a 5% gap between boys' and girls' performance. Overall, approximately one third of Indigenous students are below the agreed minimum standard (Figures supplied by MCEETYA). (Please refer to Table 2 in Appendix A.)

3.2 Access

Access to ECEC is affected by the interrelationship of a number of factors: availability, suitability, quality and cost. First and foremost, a place must be available; it must suit the family's needs in terms of location, hours available, and the service provided; it must meet at least a minimum standard of quality; and it must be affordable.

Governments at all levels have adopted various strategies to address issues relating to access. These include the direct financing of supply, stimulating or capping private investment,

subsidising parent fees, providing information to families about ECEC services in their area and providing transport to schools. The following section examines the status quo and canvasses some concerns relating to access. More information on the financial strategies to address access is included in the section on Funding and Financing (Section 4.6, p.50).

3.2.1 Supply

Commonwealth. Through FaCS, the Commonwealth provides financial resources to support the majority of ECEC services apart from school and preschool. It addresses the supply of such services through the provision of direct operational subsidies to Family Day Care Schemes, some Occasional Care Centres, Multifunctional Children's Services, Multifunctional Aboriginal Services and non-profit services in rural areas and urban fringes which are deemed to be disadvantaged; and by providing means-tested fee subsidies to parents.

The adequacy of current supply is the subject of some debate because of the interrelationship between supply, demand and affordability. In the area of long day care, supply meets estimated aggregate demand (DFaCS, 1998). At the same time service providers report changing patterns of service usage with an increasing number of children attending on a part-time basis and an overall drop in utilisation. The two main reasons proffered for these altered patterns of usage are changing demographics and fee increases. There has been a drop in the overall population of children aged under five years. At the same time, many services which had long waiting lists prior to 1996 experienced a substantial drop in demand after the introduction of significant fee increases (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 1998).

The supply of long day care places has increased considerably in the past decade. To help draw a picture of current supply issues it is useful to give a brief overview of significant relevant policy developments.

For almost the decade prior to 1991, the supply of child care places through Commonwealth funding was subject to a needs-based planning process and all funding was available only to the community-based non-profit sector. During this time, demand for child care places far outweighed supply. Guidelines were developed to ensure that preference for a child care place went to families that fitted the government's priorities for child care related expenditure (these being broadly: children of parents in the workforce, or where parents were looking for work, or studying/training for work; children with a disability or children whose parents have a continuing disability; and children at risk of abuse or neglect).

In 1991, the supply of long day care centres was transformed with the granting of fee subsidies to families using the private sector. This change in policy provided a stimulus to private sector investment. Although planning approval was required for new community-based places, for-profit child care places were not subject to a planning process. Uneven and unforeseen growth resulted, with some areas experiencing an oversupply of places, whilst demand and gaps in supply, such as places for children aged 0–2, still existed in some regions.

In 1997, in an attempt to address issues of unplanned growth, a planning mechanism was introduced which capped the number of new long day care places for which fee subsidy would be available to 7,000 a year, over two years. This cap has since expired. The Commonwealth proposes to address the issue of oversupply by providing information to potential investors on regional supply issues, including advertising high need areas and providing information on areas of under and over supply to prospective operators, local governments and financial institutions. Provision in the new Family Assistance Legislation, which takes effect from 1 July 2000, enables the Commonwealth to again limit the number and location of new child care places in the future, if necessary.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that such investment decisions are not always made on a rational business basis. It does appear, however, that the boom in private sector investment has slowed in recent years. Indeed, some private sector services are closing, perhaps redressing oversupply in specific areas.

Although regional oversupply is an issue, so too are pockets of undersupply. In rural and remote areas this issue has been partially addressed through targeted funding, such as the Disadvantaged Area Subsidy Program which provides support to assist services in some rural and urban fringe areas. A more recent focus of the Commonwealth is to provide financial incentives to private for-profit long day care operators to establish services in rural and remote areas which are undersupplied and to introduce in-home care services for families where other forms of care are not available.

States and Territories. The major direct service provision focus of most States and Territories is access to schools and preschools. To reiterate, preschools may be located on school premises, located next to schools, exist as stand alone premises with no affiliation to a particular school, exist as discrete programs within long day care centres, exist as integrated programs within long day care centres, and may fall under the same management structure as the school (government and non-government), or be managed by independent parent committees or sponsor bodies (such as the Crèche and Kindergarten Association in Queensland). Each State and Territory will have a particular form of preschool provision which predominates.

Most States and Territories aim for the universal provision of a preschool place for children in the year before school, with Western Australia guaranteeing preschool provision in the two years before school. In many jurisdictions preschools may also be attended by younger children although a place is not necessarily guaranteed.

There is an increasing recognition of the educational component of the programs offered by long day care centres, with some States providing funding to preschool programs within long day care centres as well as to discrete preschools.

Local Governments. Local government involvement in ECEC services varies. Local governments are not required to provide support for ECEC services, and in some cases other government policies (such as compulsory competitive tendering in Victoria) have applied pressure on local governments to withdraw direct support. Nevertheless some local governments manage a number of ECEC services and employ specific early childhood personnel to provide management support and resources. Children's Services Officers within local government will often facilitate networks between the services in their local area, and coordinate shared inservice training.

3.2.2 Affordability

Fee subsidies are available in recognition that most families cannot afford the full cost of ECEC. The Commonwealth currently provides fee subsidies to eligible families in the form of Childcare Assistance (CA) and Childcare Rebate (CR). Preschool attendance is subsidised by the States and Territories either by direct funding to services or by combining this funding with fee subsidies to eligible families.

Fee levels are influenced by a variety of factors such as government policy, movements in award wages, service charging practices, changes to State regulations, and increases in overheads such as rates, utilities and insurance.

The following section will look at issues concerning affordability as they relate to specific service types.

Long Day Care and Family Day Care. Despite the availability of fee subsidies, affordability is often cited as a major concern. Child care fees over recent years have increased with fees in the long day care centres increasing more than in other sectors of the industry. From 1991–1999, centres increased their weekly fees for full-time long day care on average by 6.5% (\$6.90 per week) each year, representing a total increase of 59%, well in excess of inflationary indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and Average Weekly Earnings, although fee increases have eased to 4% per annum over the past few years (figures supplied by FaCS). Average fees in long day care centres range from \$127.00 a week to \$182.00 a week, and in family day care from \$129.00 a week to \$161.00 (SCRCSSP, 2000a). Fee levels are not regulated by government. The average gross weekly income was \$658 per week, in 1997–1998 and the current minimum wage is \$385.40 per week (ABS, 2000a; New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission, 2000).

Although CA and CR make a significant contribution to the cost of care, CA and CR are paid up to a specified amount, not the actual fee charged. The maximum rate of assistance for CA is \$96.50 a week for one child and the maximum rate of CR is \$28.95 a week for one child. As a result there is a gap fee which must be bridged by parents regardless of their income. The average gap fee for full time care has risen from \$20 a week in 1991 to \$55 a week in September 1999 (figures supplied by FaCS).

CA is a progressive subsidy, which provides greater assistance to those on lower incomes and with more than one child in care. In April 1999 families on an annual gross income of \$27,000 spent 11% of their weekly disposable income on centre-based long day care. In comparison, families with an annual gross family income of \$65,000 spent 14% of their weekly disposable income (SCRCSSP, 2000a). For a low income family with two children in full-time long day care, out-of-pocket expenses as a proportion of disposable income drops significantly from 60% before, to 16% after, government assistance. For a family with two children in full-time long day care and an income of \$65,000, the proportion of out-of-pocket expenses to disposable income drops from 33% before to 21% after government assistance (figures supplied by FaCS). In family day care, out-of-pocket costs tended to be less. (Please refer to Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix A.)

The relationship between Affordability, Demand and Supply. This section looks specifically at the interplay of affordability, supply and demand in relation to trends impacting upon long day care centres, as this issue has been the subject of considerable contention in recent years. Centre-based long day care has experienced major changes in recent years in terms of changes to subsidies and the consequences of these have been the subject of considerable debate.

Patterns of usage have changed. From 1995 to 1999, average hours of child care usage decreased from 28 hours to 24.5 hours per week in long day care centres (figures supplied by FaCS), and a number of services in both the community-based and private sectors report a decrease in full time attendance and an increase in part time attendance, the loss of families on low incomes and a decrease in overall attendance. Figures for CA show a decline in its use by those entitled to maximum assistance. A number of services have closed and many services report closures of rooms. However, figures from FaCS also indicate that there has been a net increase of 190 centres between July 1996 to December 1999.

A number of reasons are advanced for these changes. The extent of the connection between changes in affordability and changes in demand is another subject of contention. Several submissions to the Senate Inquiry which led to the Report on Child Care Funding (1998) argued that the fee increases which accompanied cuts to operational subsidy and changes to the criteria for CA, resulted in falling utilisation. In turn, falling utilisation rates have been linked to centre and room closures. Another view is that changing patterns of utilisation and centre

closures are the result of an increase in the availability of part-time and more flexible working arrangements and the decreasing population of children aged under five.

The socio-economic pattern of these closures again is subject to conflicting analyses, with claims that closures have occurred mainly in areas where the median weekly family income is significantly below the state median and others asserting that centre closures are evenly spread across all socio-economic levels.

In an effort to address the issue of affordability a new fee subsidy (Child Care Benefit) is being introduced from 1 July 2000 (this will be discussed in more detail under Section 4.6 Funding and Financing, on p.50).

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC). In 1998, significant funding changes for OSHC came into effect. Direct funding to services in the form of operational subsidies were withdrawn and replaced by significantly increased CA to families. Although the accompanying cut to operational subsidy resulted in fee increases, the higher level of assistance available enabled many families to maintain or gain access. The Disadvantaged Area Subsidy is also available to OSHC in rural and urban fringe areas.

Preschools. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory, government preschool services are provided at no compulsory cost to parents. In Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory the majority of families pay some fee, although this fee is not compulsory. In New South Wales and Queensland fees vary depending upon the provider of the service. Fee rates are difficult to compare as they may be charged differently – hourly, weekly or yearly. However, fees in government provided preschools range from \$5 a week to \$1.10–\$1.85 an hour. Preschools provided through the Catholic and Independent sector may charge higher fees.

Mixed ECEC Arrangements. A possible indicator of difficulties relating to affordability of ECEC is the use of multiple care and education arrangements, although it must be noted that multiple care arrangements are also made by parent choice. A recent report from the New South Wales DoCS Office of Child Care indicates that many parents are relying upon multiple care arrangements for their children (DoCS, 1999, unreleased) and this concern is echoed in other areas of Australia. Children may be experiencing a number of different settings in the day or week, for instance a mixture of long day care, preschool, and informal care (often grandparents). In the families surveyed, 75% of two year olds and 64% of one year olds surveyed used more than two types of care in a week. The use of multiple care arrangements may also have implications for the quality of children's experiences. In the DoCS report, providers note that often such children take longer to settle into the service and parents expressed concern about the level of separation anxiety their children experience.

In addition, it is a concern that in a context of limited resources there is competition for clients between long day care services (centres and family day care), and preschool and long day care as parents juggle different types of care to pull together affordable ECEC arrangements.

ECEC Initiatives. In an effort to increase access to ECEC services, a number of initiatives have been taken by different levels of government. The South Australian and Commonwealth Governments fund a number of integrated services for rural areas which incorporate both preschool and child care. Some State and Territory Governments fund a preschool teacher or preschool program within existing long day care centres. Some preschools offer double sessions thereby enabling children to attend four sessions of preschool over two days or over four days, depending upon parents' needs. In addition, a number of preschools are exploring the option of offering an outside preschool program for children once the preschool session has finished.

Schools. Access to school education is regarded as a child's right. State and Territory Governments have the constitutional responsibility to ensure the provision of schooling to all children of school age. The delivery of school education rests with State and Territory Governments and non-government school education authorities and schools. The fees charged by non-government schools vary widely.

In government school systems, parents may be asked to make a voluntary financial contribution to the school. The amounts are usually set by individual schools. School buses are provided, free of charge, to bring students to school.

3.2.3 Access to ECEC for Communities with Additional Needs

It is widely acknowledged that particular communities and families will experience difficulties in gaining access to ECEC unless specialist programs are provided. These include rural and remote communities, Indigenous communities, families for whom English is a second language and families where children or parents have disabilities. Problems in gaining access may arise from such factors as the lack of services available, the physical or cultural inappropriateness of services, language barriers, insufficient numbers of staff to provide the level of care and education required, or a lack of specific expertise in staff.

Access to ECEC for additional needs groups is supported by all levels of government in a number of ways, including the provision of funding and the provision of specialist services. There is a myriad of services to assist children with additional needs, with each State and Territory offering its own mix of service approaches. It is not possible to canvass all of these in this report.

By and large Australia aims for the inclusion of children with additional needs within existing services. Many programs are targeted to ensure that ECEC is culturally and linguistically appropriate, and that staff are provided with the resources and training to enable them to cater to children with disabilities.

Early intervention services also exist as separate facilities providing specialist support to families, particularly in the area of disability. These services may also link in with formal ECEC options to work toward inclusion. For instance, in the Australian Capital Territory early intervention units are co-located with preschools and may offer a transition into the mainstream program. In South Australia, a number of specialist programs are offered within mainstream preschools and schools to facilitate inclusion.

Despite such efforts, access to services for families with special needs is not always successful. Existing services may not have sufficient resources to meet demand, some regions may not be able to offer the specialist services required for a particular need, the needs of a particular group or individual may not fit the categories for specialist assistance, or individual settings may fail to adequately incorporate the principles of inclusion. The educational disadvantage of Australia's Indigenous people provides an illustration of some of the difficulties additional needs groups may face in terms of access. The Indigenous population is recognised as being the most educationally disadvantaged group in the country. A number of factors have been identified as contributing to this. These include inadequate inclusion of Indigenous cultural needs, values and backgrounds in the educational setting; limited access to educational services in remote locations; the fact that for many Indigenous children English is not their first language; and additional factors such as poverty and ill health (MCEETYA, 1997). Similar factors can be identified in other ECEC environments.

There was considerable attention to early intervention at Commonwealth, State and Territory levels throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with the publication of major national reviews (Elkins

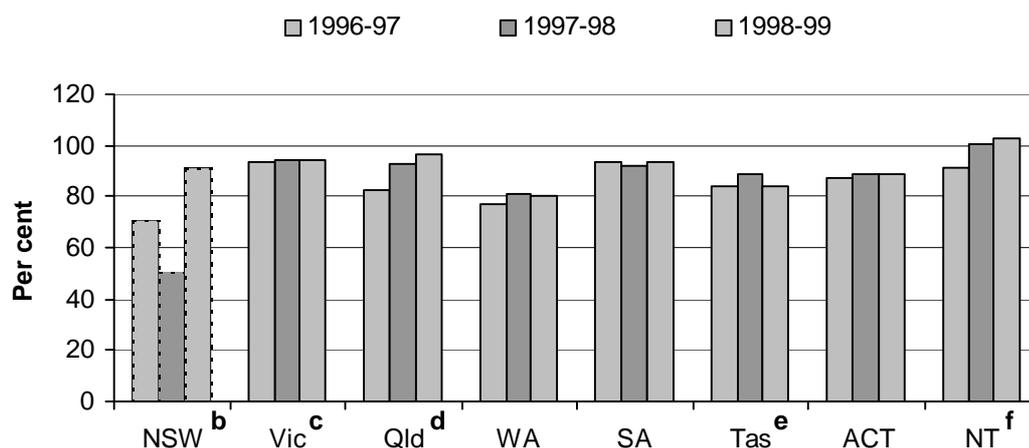
et al., 1980; Watts et al., 1981). In recent years there has been considerable growth in early intervention but there has been limited evaluation and research in this area of ECEC of the scale that was undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s (Hayes, 1991). More information related to additional needs groups is outlined in the section on Funding and Financing (Section 4.6, p.50).

3.3 Current Coverage

It is estimated that at least 18.2% of children 12 years and under had access to Commonwealth, State and Territory Government funded and/or provided ECEC services (other than school) in 1997–98 (SCRCSSP, 2000a).

According to the Report on Government Services, 2000, access to preschool programs is quite high ranging from 80.4% of children in preschool the year before school in Western Australia to 96.3% in Queensland. Note, however, that actual attendance rates may be higher than the chart indicates in some jurisdictions as not all estimates include all preschool programs offered across all settings.

Figure 2: Proportion of total children in the population who attended State and Territory Government funded or provided preschool services immediately before the commencement of compulsory full time schooling^a



^a The denominator — the population of preschool aged children — is defined as persons aged 4 years in all States and Territories except WA, where preschool aged children are defined as persons aged 5 years. The data are sourced from the ABS.

^b Data for 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99 are not directly comparable. Data for 1996-97 (but not 1997-98) include children attending preschool services other than in the year before the commencement of compulsory full time schooling. Data for 1996-97 and 1997-98 exclude preschool services delivered in centre based long day care centres. Data for 1998-99 include children aged 4 years and over using preschool services operated by the Department of Community Services and the Department of Education and Training, and children aged 4 years attending government funded or provided child care services (excluding vacation care).

^c Includes some children attending preschool services conducted in a centre based long day care centre.

^d Includes non-State preschool data for the first time in 1997-98.

^e Excludes children attending non-State preschools.

^f Data for 1996-97 were at August 1996; data for 1997-98 were for the calendar year ending 1997; data for 1998-99 were for the calendar year ending 1998. There is some double counting of children because they move in and out of preschool services of the preschool system throughout the year; as a result, the number of children in preschool exceeds the number of children in the target population.

Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSSP). (2000). Figure 13.2.

The proportion of children attending services included in the Commonwealth child care census rose nationally from 14.6% in 1995–1996 to 16.0% in 1997–1998 (SCRCSSP, 2000a). There has been an increase in the use of outside school hours care since CA became more generous. Around 15% of children using long day care and 21% of children using family day care are under two years of age (DFaCS, 1999). Usage is predominantly part time (63%). (Please refer to Tables 5, 6 and 7 in Appendix A.)

Section 4: Policy Approaches

4.1 Overseeing Quality

4.1.1 Regulations

All States and Territories are involved in the monitoring of schools and regulation of services for children under school age. The monitoring of ECEC may be split between departments of education (schools and some preschools), and departments of health and/or community services (services for children under five). In most instances, regulations governing non-school ECEC come under child welfare legislation.

Regulations establish the conditions with which services must comply in order to obtain a license to operate. They usually cover areas such as record keeping, physical space, health and safety, and staff matters such as ratios of staff to children and staffing qualifications.

Long day care centres are regulated in every State and Territory; family day care services are regulated in some States and the Australian Capital Territory; home-based care is regulated in a few States only; and outside school hours care is not regulated in any State or Territory except the Australian Capital Territory (although regulations for outside school hours are currently being canvassed in each jurisdiction). The regulation or monitoring of preschools varies according to which Department has jurisdiction over them. An emerging trend is the entry of private schools into the preschool area, and in some cases, long day care. In most jurisdictions, legislation is being modified to take this new player into account.

In general the following are usually excluded from regulation—child minding, babysitting and playgroups, although South Australia regulates babysitting agencies and nanny services.

The frequency of compliance checks and the qualification requirements of personnel responsible for monitoring compliance vary according to jurisdiction. In some instances, such personnel are generic project officers for whom ECEC is but one aspect of their work. In other cases, ECEC is a major focus of their work and early childhood qualifications are preferred or required as a condition of employment.

In nearly all States and Territories, regulations governing ECEC services are under review. Table 8 gives an overview of the existing regulatory environment. (Please refer to Table 8 in Appendix A.)

All States and Territories require the registration of non-government schools. The employment of early childhood trained teachers within the early years of school is encouraged in some jurisdictions but may not be a requirement.

4.1.2 National Standards

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have developed and jointly agreed to National Standards for long day care, family day care and outside school hours care. National Standards represent the minimum standards that should apply to these services (in some cases regulatory requirements have dropped to meet national standards, in others the regulatory requirement is above the national standard). These standards do not, on their own, have legal enforceability. In some jurisdictions, legislation governing children's services has been modified to take these into account. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments

providing funding to services may include compliance with national standards as a condition of the service receiving funding.

4.1.3 The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for Long Day Care

QIAS is currently under review. The following discussion describes the system as it exists at the present time.

Australia is unique in having a national, government supported, accreditation system (QIAS) for its long day care centres that is directly tied to the provision of funding, with over 98% of centres participating.

As a system for quality assurance and improvement, QIAS focuses primarily upon the determining, or process, components of quality. It only applies to long day care centres and centres are required to participate in the QIAS process in order for their parent users to be eligible for Child Care Benefit (and, prior to 1 July 2000, Child Care Assistance).

The QIAS system is based upon the work of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States on developmentally appropriate practice and accreditation; and the Harms and Clifford Early Childhood Education Rating Scale (ECERS).

Centres undertake a self study against 52 principles identified in the QIAS document. These principles relate to interactions (between staff and children, between staff and parents, between staff); the program; nutrition, health and safety practices; and centre management and staff development.

The self study process is undertaken collaboratively between management, staff and parents. Once completed the self study is submitted to the National Childcare Accreditation Council and the centre's assessment is subject to peer review. A reviewer visits the centre and assesses the self study against his/ her observations and discussions during a one or two day visit, depending on centre size. The reviewers ratings are moderated. Accreditation status is determined by the Council. An independent Accreditation Decisions Review Committee is available to consider appeals against the accreditation decision. All moderation, appeals and accreditation decisions are made blind, that is without any knowledge of the identity of the centre, on the basis of written documentation.

The QIAS process has been widely supported as having drawn attention to the actual quality of children's experiences of day care, and as a means of enabling centres to evaluate the quality of their service provision. At the same time there have been a number of concerns. These mainly relate to a perception that accreditation status (1, 2 or 3 years) is not consistently applied, and that centres which fail to achieve accreditation have not had eligibility for CA or CCB withdrawn. The latter is, to some extent, related to the fact that the system focuses on both improvement and accreditation. Rather than being immediately censured, centres which at first do not achieve accreditation are encouraged to put in a plan of action to improve quality. Censure is based upon a centre's failure to participate in the system, or failing for a third time to become accredited after two previous unsuccessful attempts.

The QIAS Review. One of the first tasks for the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council was to review the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. Proposed solutions were to be within current funding arrangements where possible and be supported by a cost-effectiveness analysis, exploring the impact on small business and on the Commonwealth. The Council consulted extensively in the course of the review with the consultations showing strong support for the QIAS, the widespread desire to maintain a high level of quality in child care centres, but also the need to make the process less complex, less time consuming and better

coordinated with State licensing provisions. The Council's final recommendations are aimed at streamlining and simplifying QIAS administrative requirements and ensuring greater validity and consistency in the accreditation process. These recommendations are subject to Ministerial approval before being adopted.

Accreditation for Family Day Care, Outside Schools Hours Care and Preschool. The Commonwealth is supporting the development of pilot quality assurance systems for family day care (for implementation mid 2001) and outside school hours care (for implementation mid 2002), whilst the New South Wales Office of Child Care is funding a pilot accreditation program for preschools.

4.2 Other Initiatives

4.2.1 The AECA Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics is a voluntary code, developed under the auspices of the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) as a basis for critical reflection to help inform the decisions and behaviour of those involved in the provision of early childhood services. The code is divided into five sections to encourage reflection upon practice in relation to children, families, colleagues, community and society, and as a professional. The preface to the Code is as follows:

“Adherence to this code necessarily involves a commitment to:

- ✍ View the well-being of the individual child as having fundamental importance.
- ✍ Acknowledge the uniqueness of each person.
- ✍ Consider the needs of the child in the context of the family and culture, as the family has a major influence on the young child.
- ✍ Take into account the critical impact of self esteem on an individual's development.
- ✍ Base practice on sound knowledge, research and theories, while at the same time recognising the limitations and uncertainties of these.
- ✍ Work to fulfil the right of all children and their families to services of high quality.”

(AECA, 1991)

4.2.2 Early Childhood Curricula

Several States are engaged in the process of developing, reviewing or implementing early childhood curricula. South Australia has developed a 0–18 curriculum with a strong focus on the early years. The 0–8 focus is for use in the early years of school and preschool, and for voluntary use by other ECEC services. Queensland has developed the *Preschool Curriculum Guidelines*, a curriculum document that is mandated for use in all State preschools and is recommended for use in other early childhood services in Queensland. Western Australia has a curriculum framework that encompasses Kindergarten (for children aged three) to Year 12 (the final year of secondary school). New South Wales is in the process of developing an early childhood curriculum framework for use in non-school ECEC settings. Tasmania is currently undertaking a review of early childhood curriculum issues and the Australian Capital Territory is reviewing the role of preschool in the context of overall ECEC provision. This attention to early childhood curricula, nationwide, is indicative of the increasing focus on children's early years. It also represents a concerted effort to strengthen the links between all ECEC.

Australian debates concerning the development of early childhood curricula for use outside schools reflect similar international concerns as to the appropriateness of curriculum documents for young children. Some regard the development and implementation of early childhood curricula as creating an externally imposed teaching structure which may have little to do with the individual needs of children. Advocates argue that this is a narrow understanding of

curricula and that such documents can be used to generate, deepen and enhance the understanding of early childhood practice with infants and young children without taking away the ability of early childhood practitioners to use observation and developmental knowledge to plan for children's individual needs.

4.2.3 The National Agenda for Quality in Schooling

The *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century* are a set of common goals for schooling agreed to by State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments. These goals are focused on students rather than the strategies and processes of education providers. They establish broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in achieving high quality outcomes for all students. The goals are divided into three sections concerned with the outcomes sought for students, the curriculum and social justice.

Accompanying these goals is work on measuring and reporting educational outcomes nationally. National reporting on outcomes is intended to focus effort on raising standards in Australian schools, and making schools more accountable to their communities as a means of driving improvements.

Of particular current interest to ECEC is the goal relating to literacy and numeracy which states "that every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level". Ministers have also agreed "that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years".

To support this goal a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan focuses on the early years of schooling. All States and Territories have implemented strategies to put in place the elements of the plan which include:

- ~~///~~ comprehensive assessment of all students as early as possible, to identify those students at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national numeracy and literacy goals;
- ~~///~~ early intervention to address the needs of students identified as at risk;
- ~~///~~ national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy;
- ~~///~~ assessment of students against national benchmarks;
- ~~///~~ national reporting on student achievement; and
- ~~///~~ professional development for teachers.

The national benchmarks developed for literacy and numeracy in Years 3, 5 and 7 define a level of satisfactory performance. Information gathered from the benchmarking process may have implications for curriculum and pedagogical practice in the early childhood years, particularly as there is a focus upon the role of early intervention in improving student outcomes.

In March 2000, the Prime Minister launched the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The objective of the Strategy is to achieve English literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other young Australians. The following are key elements of the strategy:

- ~~///~~ lifting school attendance rates of Indigenous students to national levels;
- ~~///~~ effectively addressing the hearing and other health problems that undermine learning for a large proportion of Indigenous students;
- ~~///~~ providing, wherever possible, preschooling opportunities;

- ~~///~~ training sufficient numbers of teachers in the skills and cultural awareness necessary to be effective in Indigenous communities and schools and encouraging them to remain for reasonable periods of time;
- ~~///~~ ensuring teaching methods known to be most effective are employed; and
- ~~///~~ instituting transparent measures of success as a basis for accountability for schools and teachers.

Important aspects of the Strategy are the involvement of local communities, schools, parents and students; cooperative action between the Commonwealth and States and Territories and coordinated action within the Commonwealth Government.

In March 2000, the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for Education also committed to a National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. The Ministers agreed to a model of a culturally inclusive school which is designed for use by schools and systems as a means of creating sustainable change and improvement by integrating successful outcomes of Indigenous programs into mainstream schooling practice.

The Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) provides supplementary funding to education providers to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. Education providers in receipt of IESIP funding are required to monitor and report on their performance in eight priority areas, including literacy and numeracy, educational outcomes, Indigenous employment, involvement in educational decision-making by Indigenous people and culturally inclusive curriculum.

4.2.4 Other

Some regions are trialling new approaches to defining and measuring quality which may more readily recognise its contextual dimensions, particularly in relation to Indigenous communities in remote areas. Mainstream programs often do not translate into these particular contexts as they fail to recognise such things as differences in parenting styles, cultural mores and customs, community responsibilities for children, and the lack of physical infrastructure which much of mainstream Australia takes for granted.

Territory Health is developing a regulations workbook for use in Aboriginal communities to enable communities to respond to regulatory requirements for children's services in a way which recognises each community's particular cultural context and needs.

There is also increasing interest in Aboriginal parenting styles and how this knowledge can be reflected in culturally appropriate program development.

4.3 Staffing

Staff are crucial to the quality of ECEC. The understanding of children's development which staff bring to their work, adequate ratios of staff to children, and consistency of staff have all been cited as important to the provision of good quality care and education.

4.3.1 Types of Personnel

In Australia, the staffing of ECEC varies according to the regulatory requirements of each State and Territory (please refer to Table 7 in Appendix A). A range of personnel, qualified and

unqualified, may be employed according to service type. The number of qualified staff required and the nature of the qualification will vary according to regulation and jurisdiction.

Long Day Care Centres. Specifically trained early childhood personnel are required in long day care centres. Long day care centres employ a mix of contact staff. This mix will include staff with different levels of early childhood training and untrained staff. In some jurisdictions early childhood teachers are a requirement and there may be a requirement for the supervisor of the daily program to have an early childhood qualification.

Family Day Care. Staff working in the coordination units of Family Day Care Schemes are required to have relevant qualifications in jurisdictions where regulations apply. National Family Day Care Standards also specify qualifications for staff of coordination units. Family day carers are not required by regulations to have any qualifications, apart from a first aid certificate. Individual schemes may require carers to undertake orientation programs before they are registered as care providers and all schemes offer in-service training programs to carers.

Preschools. A teaching qualification is required to teach in preschools. Preschool programs may be staffed by early childhood teachers but an early childhood qualification is not always a requirement.

Schools. In most jurisdictions, teachers within schools are required to be registered with the relevant education authorities. In some jurisdictions registration enables a teacher to teach in any section of the school system – early childhood, primary or secondary. In other jurisdictions specific qualifications are required. In practice, the early years of school for children aged 5–8 years are usually staffed by primary or early childhood trained teachers.

Outside School Hours Care. Under National Standards, outside schools hours care must employ one qualified staff member for every 30 children including the coordinator of the service who must be qualified. The qualification may be in teaching (primary or early childhood), child care or recreation. Although most outside school hours care is currently unregulated, those services in receipt of Commonwealth funding are encouraged to meet National Standards. Inservice training is available to the staff and management of these services through Resource and Training Agencies.

Formal training is available to family day carers and outside school hours care workers through the Vocational Education sector (see below). (Please refer to Tables 9 and 10 in Appendix A.)

Requirement for Police Checks on Prospective Personnel. All jurisdictions require police checks for ECEC personnel, or are in the process of introducing mechanisms to do so.

4.3.2 Training and Professional Qualifications Available

There are two main avenues for gaining relevant qualifications and training: higher education (mainly the university sector), which comes under the ambit of the Commonwealth Government; and the State / Territory based vocational education sector which is comprised of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and private training providers (Registered Training Organisations). There are a number of early childhood qualifications offered and a number of pathways to gaining qualifications.

The main types of qualifications currently recognised by children's services regulations are: early childhood teaching degrees; the Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services); and the Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services). There are a number of other qualifications which are no longer available but which are still recognised as appropriate qualifications for working in services.

As not all early childhood personnel are required to be qualified to these levels, there are also a number of other certificates available which help prepare staff and provide pathways into further education.

Vocational Education. Students undertake Diplomas and Certificates through Vocational Education and Training, offered through TAFE and Registered Training Organisations. These include the:

Certificate II in Community Services (Children's Services)
Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services)
Certificate IV in Community Services (Children's Services)
Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services)
Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services)

These qualifications allow for specialisations in either centre-based care, outside school hours care or family day care. The Advanced Diploma focuses on specialist skills such as management.

Training is offered via nationally-endorsed training packages which set out the relevant competencies to be attained. Training packages can be delivered and competencies demonstrated in a number of different ways, including on the job training and assessment, and long distance education.

Higher Education. Early childhood teaching degrees are offered through the university sector. These may be three or four year degrees, depending upon the institution in which they are offered. These degrees enable teachers to work in ECEC settings for children under five, and in some cases, in the early years of school.

There is a capacity for articulation between certificates, diplomas and degrees. A student with a Certificate is given advanced standing towards the Diploma. Those with a Diploma, enrolled in a teaching degree, are given recognition for previous study by being credited with a specified number of units toward the degree.

In-service Education. The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments provide funds for in-service education and resources to the management and staff of early childhood services. In-service education enables those involved in the delivery of ECEC to keep abreast of current research, practice and developments in the field, as well as to address specific issues. It plays an important part in breaking down professional isolation by providing opportunities for networking and the exchange of ideas.

A list of resource and advisory agencies relevant to non-school settings can be found in Appendix D.

4.3.3 Industrial Issues

The wages and conditions of most early childhood personnel are determined by the award or enterprise agreement which covers them. Union coverage of early childhood staff is quite complex and involves a number of unions. The four main unions which cover contact staff working in ECEC are the Australian Education Union (AEU) which covers teachers at public schools; the Independent Education Union (IEU) which covers teachers in early childhood centres and independent schools; the Liquor, Hospitality, and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) which covers all other contact staff (excluding nurses) in ECEC settings outside local government and schools; and the Australian Services Union (ASU) which provides coverage

for all staff employed in services run by local government. In most States and Territories, family day carers are regarded as self employed and therefore outside union coverage.

There are significant disparities in wages and conditions between teachers in long day care and teachers in preschools and schools, with teachers in long day care receiving lower pay, having a much larger administrative load, fewer holidays and less preparation and planning time for children's activities. Even greater discrepancies exist between the wages and conditions of teaching staff and other child care workers. It is possible for a two year trained Advanced Child Care Worker and a three or four year trained teacher to face the same responsibilities in a child care centre if employed as the director or supervisor of the program. Whilst the wage differentials recognise differences in qualification levels, they do not recognise the similarity in work responsibilities. Wage differentials and the different nature of each union gives another indication of the diverse perspectives from which ECEC is viewed—as educational, or as a service to families, or as a caring industry.

In relation to non-teaching staff in centre-based services, a recent investigation into pay equity in New South Wales found that child care work typified the poorly paid nature of work performed predominantly by women and its undervaluing was linked to the fact that it is a female dominated occupation. It found that child care workers were performing a range of functions which extended from caring and nurturing through to professional or para-professional work associated with the development and teaching of children (New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission, 2000).

Many factors, historical and contemporary, contribute to the low wages of those employed in ECEC, including the fact that it is a predominantly female workforce. Historically, work with children was viewed as a natural extension of women's traditional domestic interests rather than a skilled occupation. The origins of ECEC in charitable work also served to have a dampening effect on wages. Today, the close relationship many staff have with parents in early childhood services can result in staff reluctance to pursue improved wages and conditions and to resist unpaid overtime. Staff are conscious that improvements in their working conditions may flow on as fee increases. They tend to be conscious of the impact of fee increases on the ability of the families to access services, and this has had a restraining impact on actions for higher wages and/or better conditions.

The amount of unpaid overtime that child care workers, teachers and centre directors take on is significant and consists of activities such as the preparation of developmental activities, shopping for the service, attendance at meetings, administration and participation in professional development.

Another staffing issue which faces ECEC in the non-school sector and which has implications for the quality of care and education offered to children, is staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. These factors seem to be connected to the levels of stress which staff experience coupled with poor pay and conditions and a limited career structure (Heiler, 1996). Some schools and preschools also face difficulties in staff recruitment, particularly in remote areas. Such difficulties may be compounded by a shortage of appropriate housing (MCEETYA, 1997).

4.3.4 Males in ECEC

The ABS 1996 Census indicates that only 3.3% of Australian childcare workers and 2.3% of preprimary teachers are men (ABS, 1996b). It is believed that the number of men participating in the field is increasing slowly and that men are moving away from contact roles into management positions. In Sydney, a Men in Early Childhood Education Network facilitates the informal mentoring of men enrolled in early childhood professional preparation programs.

4.3.5 Staffing and the Quality of ECEC

The interrelationship between staff and the quality of ECEC means that trends in staffing patterns often have implications for the quality of the service provided.

A shortage of early childhood teachers is leading to difficulties in their recruitment across schools, preschools and long day care.

Several additional factors are having an impact upon the staffing of long day care centres, including a shortage of other trained early childhood staff. The need to minimise costs in order to minimise fee increases has worked against the employment of teachers where these are not a regulatory requirement. For similar reasons, services report an increasing reliance upon the use of casual and part-time staff. As consistency of caregivers is considered to be an important component of quality this has potentially detrimental implications for quality. Higher staff turnover is another factor threatening continuity of care.

The move to more flexible training options through competency based training is relatively recent and the subject of discussion and contention in relation to its potential impact upon quality. The inclusion of specialisations in outside school hours care and family day care is generally welcomed for providing formal training options for staff in these areas. In addition, flexibility in course delivery is hoped to provide greater opportunities for staff currently working in a range of ECEC settings to commence or upgrade their training and qualifications. Successful competency based training is reliant upon the quality of on-the-job supervision and the integrity of assessment procedures. An issue raised in relation to many ECEC settings is that time is limited therefore adequate ongoing supervision for training can be difficult to provide. Another concern expressed in the ECEC field is that the packaging of training around competencies may undermine the theoretical underpinnings of early childhood practice and the role of reflection in teacher development.

Finally, it is relevant to raise some issues relating to staffing and training for Indigenous students in remote communities. The introduction of more flexible training options does provide an avenue for many such students to access training. However, there is an increased understanding that if training is to be successful and relevant it needs to recognise the particular context of each community, as well as appreciate variations in cultural values and skills involving children and child rearing practices.

4.4 Program Content and Implementation

Program content and implementation may be influenced by a range of factors including educational philosophy, curriculum requirements, religious affiliation and responses to particular community needs. In Australia, there are variations in program content. To some extent, these variations reflect the type of setting in which the program is located. However, variations also exist between settings of the same type as each service develops its own emphasis and pedagogical approach, often in response to its community.

Specific philosophical influences can be found in early childhood programs. For instance, there are a small but significant number of Steiner and Montessori programs in schools and preschools. Developmentally appropriate practice, underpinned by concepts of play-based learning and sensitivity to children's development and individual differences, has long been emphasised in early childhood teacher training courses and through quality assurance mechanisms. In recent years, many early childhood educators have been drawing upon the influence of Reggio Emilia. In recognition of the diverse nature of Australian society much work has been done toward implementing multicultural and anti-bias approaches to programs within ECEC, with varying degrees of success.

In addition, different models of early childhood curriculum can, in many instances, be discerned between different ECEC settings. These may arise from such factors as the focus of the setting, or its staffing profile. It is not unusual to find different curriculum approaches in schools, preschools and long day care centres – even in cases where all are staffed by early childhood teachers. The early childhood curriculum initiatives and reviews, previously mentioned, are aimed at promoting more consistent early childhood practice in all ECEC settings and breaking down the division between education and care by promoting the understanding that children’s learning and development occurs in all contexts.

However, the desirability of early childhood curriculum is not universally accepted and debates about curriculum content and the appropriate policy context for ECEC reveal a tension between different understandings of early childhood practice. Some early childhood practitioners feel that developmentally appropriate practice is under pressure from a push toward more academically oriented programs. Others regard the development of early childhood curriculum as a means of facilitating the adoption of developmentally appropriate practice in a wider range of ECEC settings, including the early years of school. The inclusion of all ECEC programs into Departments of Education raises similar debates. Such a move is a means of facilitating the integration of services across the age ranges. However, the nature of this integration can be the subject of tension, as it can either result in the downward extension of the primary curriculum into the early years, or the upward extension of early childhood practices in the first years of school. At the same time, ECEC provision within community services and health portfolios may more readily facilitate links between ECEC, family support and child health programs, but have a reduced integration with the formal education sector.

In relation to the agreed goals for schooling, the Curriculum Corporation of Australia has produced a set of Curriculum Statements and Profiles. Each State and Territory has utilised these documents to support them in their curriculum delivery or as guidelines for the development of their own curriculum documentation.

A feature of the original curriculum materials was the establishment of levels. The philosophy underpinning the documents was that, regardless of age, children would be working at or towards different levels in different curriculum areas. Planning featured the profiling of individual children with the view to providing experiences which would allow children to work at their cognitive (and not age) level. However, in the redevelopment of curriculum across Australia, some states have linked levels to age groups.

4.4.1 Transitions

Children may face a number of transitions in their use of ECEC. These are not confined to the transition to school. Children can experience transitions from home to and between ECEC settings, for example from the long day care centre or family day care environment to preschool. As families try to mix and match their out-of-home care options to meet their working needs, their budget and their own preferences, children may experience a number of transitions between different education and care environments in a week, or even in a day. It is important to be mindful of the impact of multiple transitions, particularly for younger children.

A number of States and Territories are developing strategies to improve the transitions which children experience. This is evident in curriculum developments and the moves to encourage collaboration between different ECEC settings. In addition, partnerships and collaboration with parents are actively encouraged to facilitate better transitions for children.

In relation specifically to schools, strategies include new approaches to assessment, encouraging more collaboration between all early childhood settings and schools, and co-

locating services. The first year of full time schooling for young children will often be in a specific class known as reception (South Australia), transition (the Northern Territory), kindergarten (New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory), preprimary (Western Australia), and preparatory (Tasmania and Victoria). This year is to assist the child make the transition from the preschool, long day care setting, and/or home to the early years of formal schooling. (Please refer to Table 11 in Appendix A.)

4.5 Family Engagement and Support

4.5.1 Information to Families

All levels of government have implemented strategies to inform parents of the services available in their area, and to supply information against which parents may try to assess quality and suitability.

The Child Care Access Hotline is a Commonwealth initiative which provides a toll free number for parents to call for information on Commonwealth funded child care services in their area and the government subsidies which may be available to them.

Most State and Territory Governments have internet sites which provide a wide range of information relating to ECEC programs. Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania have developed internet sites through which parents can search for services. Western Australia and New South Wales are in the process of developing similar sites.

Information booklets are available on a wide variety of subjects such as what to look for in child care, transitions to school, the range of ECEC services available and general parenting issues. Local governments may also produce information books on the ECEC services available in their area.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council provides written information on what to look for in choosing a long day care centre and has a toll free telephone number available to parents seeking advice. It also has a website.

Research into the reporting of student and school achievement has shown that parents place a higher priority on receiving information about their children's progress than any other type of information they receive from schools. The research attempts to define what constitutes best practice in school reporting to parents and demonstrates that parents want to play a more active role in the management of their children's education. Parents want to be provided with timely, objective and accessible information about their children's progress and how their school is performing (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

4.5.2 The Role of Parents in ECEC

Parent participation in the settings which care and educate their children is a strong principle for ECEC in Australia and a variety of policies at both government and service level encourage parental involvement. Parental involvement is regarded as an important factor in ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Regulations governing ECEC often specify that parents must be granted access to the service at any time it is open. The QIAS principles emphasise the need for the active exchange of information between parents and staff and the encouragement of parent involvement in the program. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy stresses the importance of parent and community involvement in education for student success. State and

Territory policies in relation to schools and preschool place emphasis upon the importance of parents in their children's education.

The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program provides resources to school based parent committees for a variety of preschool and school based activities designed to enhance educational opportunities for Indigenous students in preschool, primary and secondary schools and to involve Indigenous parents in educational decision making processes. A key aspect of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is to engage parents and the Indigenous community in a partnership with schools in order to improve attendance rates of Indigenous students.

Parent involvement can happen at a number of levels. For instance, parents may volunteer their skills and services for specific activities, contribute to the development of service policies, or be actively involved in the management of the setting. One to one communication between parents and ECEC personnel is always encouraged so that information about the children can be regularly shared.

There are a number of formal channels for parent involvement. Schools have parent representation on school councils, and Parents and Citizens or Parent and Teacher Associations often form part of the school community. In other ECEC settings, there may be parent management committees (if parent run) or parent advisory committees.

A major barrier to parental involvement is a lack of time. This is particularly true of services which cater to families where both parents are working. In some instances staff may not encourage parent involvement in their children's education. This failure to foster parent involvement can arise from a number of different factors including a lack of appropriate skills, a lack of time, or a belief that parent involvement is not a priority.

4.5.3 Parental Leave

Federal and State Government legislation provides for parental leave surrounding the birth of a child. Parents, who have completed at least 12 months continuous service with their employer by the expected date of birth, are entitled to a total of 52 weeks unpaid leave. This can be taken on a shared basis. Except for one week at the time of birth, each partner must take parental leave at different times. Both parents' combined leave cannot be more than 52 weeks. Maternity leave of up to six weeks can be taken before the birth of the child.

An employee who takes parental leave is, in most circumstances, entitled to return to the position he or she held before the leave was taken. In addition, parents may access part-time work, with the agreement of the employer, up to a maximum of two years from the birth of the child.

Paid parental leave, including maternity leave, usually ranges from 6 to 12 weeks and is available under some awards, enterprise and workplace agreements.

4.5.4 Family Allowances

Family Allowance is a means-tested payment to families with children up to age 16. Provision is made for some older dependents in specific circumstances. Maternity Allowance is a one-off payment to help families with extra costs at the time of their child's birth. It is also subject to an income and assets test.

Under the new taxation system, family allowance will be replaced by the Family Tax Benefit. Families with a dependent child under 18 will be entitled to some family tax benefit if their income is below \$76,256 per year.

4.6 Funding and Financing

Financial support for ECEC occurs from both the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments. Total government expenditure on ECEC, excluding the school sector, during 1998–99 was \$1.4 billion (SCRCSSP, 2000a).

The Commonwealth provides funding related to ECEC, other than schools and preschools through FaCS, and to government, non-government schools as well as Indigenous preschools and education programs through DETYA. The States and Territories fund Government and non-government schools and preschools, and may contribute to other ECEC programs.

4.6.1 ECEC other than Schools and Preschools

Commonwealth financial support for ECEC occurs through the provision of direct funding for service provision and subsidising parent fees. In recent years the emphasis has shifted to funding parents as consumers of ECEC rather than services as providers.

States and Territories deploy resources to license and support ECEC provision, to develop innovative services, and to support the role of parents in the care and education of their young children. They often provide additional one-off grants for special purposes.

Subsidies to Parents. Prior to 1 July 2000, the Federal Government subsidised families for their use of both formal and informal care options through the provision of Childcare Assistance (CA) and Childcare Rebate. CA was a means-tested fee subsidy available to families using long day care centres (only centres registered with the National Child Care Accreditation Council and participating in the accreditation process), family day care, Commonwealth occasional care centres and outside school hours care. CA was paid directly to approved child care services on behalf of eligible families so fees could be reduced at the time of care. The amount of CA payable was linked to family income and was therefore progressive in nature. Assistance for non-work related care was limited to 20 hours a week. The Childcare Rebate was restricted to families where both parents, or the sole parent, was using child care for work related reasons and whose children were in the care of a registered carer. It was thus available for a wider range of care, including registered home based care. All eligible families could claim the Rebate although a lower rate was payable to high income families.

A new system, the Child Care Benefit (CCB), came into effect on 1 July 2000. This benefit combined both CA and the Rebate into a single, more generous, payment. It is payable to families using approved services or registered informal carers, with families using approved services receiving a greater amount of assistance than those using informal care. The amount of CCB a family is entitled to will depend on income and the number of children in care. The maximum amount of benefit payable for a family with one child in 50 hours of care per week is \$122.

It is anticipated that Child Care Benefit will result in the cost of child care decreasing across most income ranges and circumstances. For example, the proportion of out-of-pocket expenses to disposable income for a family with an annual income of \$25,000 and two children in part-time long day care has increased from 10% in 1996 to 12% in 1999. It is projected that this figure will drop to approximately 9% under Child Care Benefit. Increases in assistance under the new payment are expected to improve affordability of child care for most families and flow

on to improved utilisation of child care services. An exception to this is the small percentage of families using services with fees over \$200 a week, who may find they receive less assistance than currently because the present Rebate increases the higher the fee paid.

Service Subsidies. An operational subsidy is paid to multifunctional Aboriginal services, multifunctional services, some Commonwealth funded occasional care centres and the coordination units of family day care schemes. A Disadvantaged Area Subsidy is available to community-based long day care and outside school hours care services in rural and urban fringe areas deemed to be disadvantaged.

Funding is also provided for the establishment of new family day care and outside school hours care services in the form of equipment, establishment and set-up grants. To date such funding has only been available to non-profit services. From 1 January 2001 private operators will be eligible to apply for this funding for new services.

New South Wales and the Northern Territory provide ongoing funding, in the form of an operational subsidy, to community-based long day care.

4.6.2 Schools

Schools are financed primarily from funding from State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments. State and Territory Governments provide capital and recurrent grants to schools. The Commonwealth provides additional recurrent, capital and specific purpose funding to government and non-government schools. Based on 1997 data, the Commonwealth provided 44% of total public funding for the government schools sector and 76% of total public funding for the non-government schools sector. Schools in the non-government sector also rely heavily on income from other sources including tuition fees. Parents provide about 45% of total funding for non-government schools.

School education is the second largest area of State and Territory government expenditure (\$14.7 billion) after health (\$16.2 billion) (SCRCSSP, 2000b).

4.6.3 Preschools

Preschool services account for the largest proportion of State and Territory government expenditure on ECEC services—at least 80% in 1998–99 (SCRCSSP, 2000a).

4.6.4 Funding for Innovative Programs

A number of innovative programs are being developed in rural and remote areas often involving the use of both Commonwealth and State/Territory funding. There is no single blueprint for these programs as each is developed to meet the particular needs of its target group. The following examples only provide an indication, not an exhaustive account, of the types of responses which are emerging. In South Australia, an integrated service in a small rural township combines state funding for preschool with Commonwealth funding for long day care, a site for the toy library and health nurse visits. In Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales, occasional blocks of child care (e.g. 3 weeks) are provided to families in isolated areas during busy work periods. Education Queensland is currently trialling the provision of an itinerant education service for the children of families who work for the travelling shows. South Australia and the Northern Territory are both involved in work with remote Aboriginal communities to provide early childhood services which appropriately respond to the particular needs of each community.

4.6.5 Children with Additional Needs

Numerous specialist programs are supported by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to improve the quality of, and access to, services for children defined as having additional needs. These include children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children, children with disabilities, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children from rural and remote areas and children at risk.

As it is not possible to outline every strategy adopted by every level of government, this section will provide an overview of national approaches and a summary of regional approaches.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. The Commonwealth, through FaCS, funds Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services for Indigenous communities and is involved in the development of a range of innovative services in remote communities (these are outlined below).

The Commonwealth through DETYA provides funding through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives (IESIP) and the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programs, in the school and preschool areas to improve educational outcomes, opportunities and parental involvement for Indigenous students. State and Territory Governments also support preschool and school provision for Indigenous students. For example, in Victoria, Koori⁴ Education Field Officers encourage children's attendance and provide support to their teachers within mainstream and Koori specialist services.

One of the key elements of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is to increase the proportion of the Indigenous 3 to 5 year old population in preschool education and ensure those students are confident and competent to enter primary school.

Several state and territory governments also provide specific assistance for Indigenous people. For example, the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care (RAATSICC) Program was established by the Queensland government in 1991 with the specific purpose of providing children's services in Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland.

The aim of the RAATSICC Program is to assist remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in North Queensland to promote the well-being of children within their extended family and cultural community. All services provided through the RAATSICC network are designed and delivered in a culturally appropriate, holistic manner and focus on child care, child protection, family support, parent education and community awareness.

Cultural Responsiveness. The Supplementary Services program (SUPS) targets the inclusion of children with additional needs, including children for whom English is a second language or who come from non-English speaking background families, into mainstream child care programs. It does so by providing to child care services training on, and resources for, appropriate planning and practice. It may, for instance, support a bilingual workers pool that centres can draw upon to help the transition of children from non-English speaking backgrounds into the service.

Children with Disabilities. SUPS is also available to assist with appropriate planning for children with disabilities.

The Special Needs Support Scheme (SNSS) provides additional support for high needs children, particularly those with a disability. This support may include direct funding for additional staffing, or for resources and/or equipment essential for including the child in mainstream programs.

The Disability Supplementary Payment (D-SUPS) provides an extra payment to family day care when the number of children a carer can take is restricted because of the demands of caring for a child with a disability.

The Commonwealth, through DETYA, provides funding under the Special Learning Needs Programme (SLNP) to government and non-government school authorities and non-school organisations and community groups to improve the educational participation of, and outcomes for, children and students with disabilities.

States and Territory Governments also fund a range of services to assist children with disabilities. These services are often targeted to facilitating access to early intervention for children whose development would be endangered without access to additional support. The types of programs funded include the provision of direct specialist support through appropriate therapists, early and supported access to mainstream preschool programs, the provision of specialist preschool programs, and financial contributions to other specialist agencies.

4.6.6 Peak Organisations and Resource and Training Agencies

Peak organisations (please refer to Appendix C) may also receive funding from Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. These organisations play an important role representing the interests of their constituents and providing information and advice to their sectors on current developments, such as research, government policy and early childhood practice.

The Commonwealth, and many State and Territory Governments contribute funds toward specialist resource and training organisations (please refer to Appendix D). This funding may be tied to specific projects or may be a contribution to organisational running costs.

4.6.7 Taxation

Major changes were introduced to Australia's taxation system on 1 July, 2000, including the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST). Child Care services are GST-free under the new tax system. As a result services do not need to charge GST as part of the fee paid by parents. However, goods and services purchased by providers as part of the supply of child care will be subject to the GST. Services can claim back any GST as tax credits.

The supply of education courses is also GST-free. This means that they are not subject to GST and providers are entitled to claim input tax credits for GST included in the price of items acquired in providing those education courses.

Endnote

4. Koori refers to the Aboriginal people of southern New South Wales and Victoria.

Section 5: Evaluation and Research

5.1 Evaluative Reviews

Evaluation occurs in a variety of ways in ECEC and the nature and results of evaluation are, of course, integrally linked to the criteria against which the evaluation is sought. Evaluative reviews have been a feature of ECEC in Australia, occurring with increasing regularity in the last decade. The reports of these reviews have included the following:

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The Auditor-General. (1994). *Mind the children: The management of the children's services*. (Audit report no.42 1993–94. Efficiency Audit). Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

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Many of these reviews, however, have been conducted in relation to criteria which are not directly linked to outcomes for children, but rather cost to government, division of government responsibilities, foreseeable parental demand via workforce trends and so forth.

Annual reports of relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments provide further evaluative comment on the state of Australian ECEC. For example, the National Report on Schooling in Australia provides a critical analysis of progress towards the achievement of national priorities and goals for schools.

5.2 Research

Several of the evaluations listed above have drawn attention to the lack of Australian research in early childhood. ECEC professionals have a long history of contribution to the development and implementation of innovative services, having “led the way” in many areas relevant to the development of programs and service models, the identification of existing and future gaps in service provision, as well as the policy directions of government. The field has a shorter history of formal involvement in research and evaluation.

The amalgamation in 1989 of the Colleges of Advanced Education with the Universities represented a major shift in the location of education and training for ECEC and followed earlier amalgamations that brought the ECEC institutions into the Colleges of Advanced Education. The Institute of Early Childhood Studies, within the Sydney College of Advanced Education was amalgamated with Macquarie University, in Sydney, the Institute of Early Childhood Development, within the Melbourne College of Advance Education was amalgamated with the University of Melbourne; and the de Lissa Institute, a part of the South Australian College of Advanced Education, was amalgamated with the University of South Australia. Similar amalgamation of the ECEC teacher training organisations within the Colleges of Advanced Education took place in the other States and Territories.

This movement of early childhood higher education institutions into the universities has resulted in a steady increase in research activity in the ECEC area. In 1991, for example, the School of Early Childhood, within the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), in Brisbane, transformed a resource and consultancy centre that had been part of the Brisbane College of Advanced Education into the Centre for Applied Studies in Early Childhood (CASEC), with a new focus on research and postgraduate teaching. Reviews of CASEC in 1994, and again last year, confirmed its status as a University Research Centre, reflecting the strategic priority afforded by QUT to research in ECEC. Similarly, within Macquarie University, the Mia Mia Child and Family Study Centre continued a longstanding commitment by the Institute of Early Childhood (and the organisations that preceded it) to innovative service development and research. ECEC has been identified as an area of research strength at Macquarie University and senior staff have been appointed to facilitate the development of a research program. At the de Lissa Institute, a Chair of Early Childhood has been jointly funded by the University of South Australia and the Department of Education Training and Employment, again with a major focus on the development of applied research programs. It is only since the move to universities that specialised ECEC research training at honours, masters and doctoral levels has been widely available in Australia.

Another example of the acceleration of research effort is the establishment in 1993 of the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference, which is held annually in the Australian national capital, at the University of Canberra. Early childhood researchers and policy writers from all States and Territories attend this conference. The conference provides a forum for scholarly discussion, networking and mentoring of new researchers. Since its inception, the conference has provided invaluable support for established and new researchers. The conference is self-funded, producing a research journal (*Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*), occasional papers, and is currently developing a web site. Notwithstanding these developments, there is still a dearth of Australian research on young children and a reliance on overseas research, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Commonwealth Government funds basic and applied research through the Australian Research Council (ARC). In the period from 1990–1999, the ARC funded 16 projects in which infants or young children were the focus. Few of these projects, however, had a specific ECEC

focus. They tended to be studies in psychology that focused on aspects of cognitive, social or linguistic development or on issues related to learning or adjustment difficulties. Increasingly, funding for joint research projects involving industry partners has been available through the Australian Research Council (ARC) Strategic Partnerships in Industry Research and Training (SPIRT). The six SPIRT grants awarded from 1997–1999, however, focus explicitly on ECEC issues.

The Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council also commissions research in order to complete the tasks referred to it by the Minister for Family and Community Services.

One of the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education (1996) was for the establishment of a National Centre for Research in Early Childhood Development to conduct longitudinal research. In 1997, the Department of Health and Family Services (the forerunner of the current FaCS) commissioned a group comprising the Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Early Childhood Research Consortium (with members for Macquarie University, the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Melbourne) to conduct a feasibility study of the value of follow-up research on the outcomes of child care. To date, there has been limited Australian research on the outcomes of ECEC.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is an important contributor to research on child care, child development and Australian family contexts. Its work is funded both from its recurrent budget and from competitive tenders.

DETYA is another major commissioner of evaluations, reviews and research, particularly related to schools. A recent initiative by the Department involves targeting early childhood in its Research Fellowship Scheme. At state level, the DoCS, Office of Child Care in New South Wales and the South Australian Department of Education, Employment and Training are also, along with the Department of Education and Training, currently active in the commissioning of research.

Section 6: Concluding Comments and Assessments

6.1 Australia at the Crossroads?

Australia, like many other nations, is undergoing complex processes of change, in multiple areas of national life. These include demographic, social and economic changes. Demographically, as discussed in Section 1, the nation is experiencing a reduced birth rate (reflecting the lowest fertility rate in recorded history) at the same time as life expectancy is increasing substantially. The convergence of these two trends has resulted in a considerable change in the age distribution of the population, with the proportion of those aged over 65 increasing while the proportion aged under 15 is decreasing. Socially, the proportions of single-parent and couple-only families are increasing while the proportion of couple families with dependent children is decreasing, as is family size. Concurrent with these trends has been the steady increase in women's participation in the workforce. Economically, as in other Western nations, the distribution of the nation's wealth across social groups has been changing, with less wealth possessed by those in the lower social groups than those in the middle and upper income groups.

Related to these economic changes are shifts in the nature of Australia's economic base from its historical dependence on primary industry and natural resources, to a heavier dependence on service industries, including tourism and the knowledge, information and communication technology-based industries (ABS, 2000e). Increasingly, Australian industries require greater flexibility from their workforces. As a result, the nature of work is changing, with decreasing unemployment and considerable variation in work arrangements for those who are employed. An increasing proportion of Australians work non-standard hours resulting in greater variation in the hours of work, the pattern of work across the year and, in some instances, the places of work. Increased casualisation of the workforce is a prominent feature of Australian industry with clear implications for ECEC. As a result, the needs of families may conflict with employer demands and family-friendly work practices are still not extensively available.

These trends highlight some salient tensions concerning Australian images of children and their place in the nation. Unlike some other nations, it is difficult to discern a consensus view of children in Australia. Historically, social policy perspectives have swung between a focus on children in their own right, and on children viewed in the wider context of their families. In recent decades, the focus on families has emphasised the need to support the workforce participation of parents or to address the needs of children labelled as vulnerable. The tension between these broad views, and variations on them, has been a feature of Australian policy and practice. In part, this tension is reflected in the divide between care and education.

In the current era, there is a view that children are a diminishing resource to be highly valued. From this perspective, investment in the nation's children is a key priority. The image of children as an "investment" has been evident throughout the last century. In the 1930s Australia, along with New Zealand, led the world in addressing the problem of infant mortality. Across the 20th Century, successive Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have placed considerable priority on public expenditure on education as a key underpinning of national development. In the latter part of the last century, however, issues related to the aging of the population tended to be a dominant policy focus. In addition, for the growing percentage of couples who choose to remain childless, investment in children may not be seen as a worthwhile national priority. There is some evidence, however, that children are again becoming the focus of national attention as reflected in recent government policy initiatives.

6.2 The Current State of Australian ECEC

Among the distinctive features of the Australian ECEC system are the involvement of successive Commonwealth Governments in the development of a nationally provided range of services for children outside school and the manner in which the system as a whole engages the commitment of State and Territory Governments. Children's access to a range of ECEC programs is supported by the availability of fee subsidies to parents and there is an increasing recognition of the role of high quality early childhood programs in facilitating children's later success at school. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are involved in extending the provision of preschool education.

The Commonwealth supported Quality Improvement and Accreditation System, and the way in which this is underpinned by State and Territory regulatory regimes, are internationally recognised strengths of the Australian centre-based long day care system. Australia also has a very diverse schooling system, comprising a government sector as well as a substantial non-government sector (involving a Catholic system and an Independent schools system). Both sectors are supported by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, with the non-government sector receiving substantial Commonwealth support.

Australian ECEC has a long history of community advocacy and involvement. Significant children's services providers such as SDN Children's Services, the Crèche and Kindergarten Association and KU Children's Services have their antecedents in the kindergarten and day nursery movements at the turn of the century. In New South Wales, the Kindergarten Union's early childhood teacher training facility, established in 1896, preceded the establishment of other teacher training institutions by several years. By 1913 early childhood training was established in almost every State in Australia.

As well as being enriched by the knowledge of, and commitment to, early childhood that such a history brings, current policy debates benefit from the involvement of a range of peak representative groups (refer to Appendix C). Such organisations contribute to policy discussions both an important working knowledge of their sectors and an ability to analyse the impact of policy upon the nature of service provision on young children and their families. As a result peak groups have had an important role to play in the formal consultative processes of government and in responding to policy as it is introduced. ECEC in Australia is also supported by a network of specialist resource and training agencies, which provide professional development programs, advice and resources to support staff and management.

At the same time, however, the Australian system of ECEC is complex because of the range of service provision, the different roles of each tier of government, and the diverse policy frameworks in which ECEC is located. ECEC in Australia is based in a number of different policy areas, including educational outcomes, women's workforce participation, support for families, and support for children's development. Divided government responsibilities for ECEC contribute to this complexity and fragmentation. Although such factors give rise to a lack of uniformity they have also produced a number of innovative and regionally responsive initiatives. An ongoing tension is the desire, on the one hand, for increased national uniformity and, on the other, for enhanced local responsiveness and ownership.

Variations in ECEC policy and provision also arise from the historical dichotomy between care and education. The ways in which the terms care and education are defined and construed differ between policy contexts. This reflects, in part, historical divisions and differences in understandings of the nature and role of care and the nature and role of education as well as the fact that responsibility for education and care falls into two policy domains, community services and education. Whilst an understanding of the interrelationship between the care and education of young children and the fact that development and learning occur in all contexts is

becoming more widespread, shared definitions and understandings are still developing and there is much to be resolved concerning the nature of, and appropriate environments for, ECEC.

There are, nevertheless, some closer collaborations among the Commonwealth, State and Territory and non-government sectors. Many examples, including MCEETYA, have been discussed in this report. State and Territory collaboration is being facilitated by the early childhood education working party of CESCEO. Within the States and Territories there are also developments towards “whole of government”, “co-ordinated” or “interagency” approaches to policy development and provision in ECEC. Western Australia has an Early Childhood Council and New South Wales a Planning Advisory Group. However, the recognition of the need for greater coordination is not a recent development. In New South Wales, for instance, the stimulus for current coordination has a genesis in the work of the Carrick Report (Committee of Review of New South Wales Schools, 1989).

In the last decade there have been significant developments in non-school ECEC policy. The long day care centre sector has shifted from being predominantly provided by non-profit services to being dominated by the for-profit sector. Reliance upon private sector investment looks likely to continue with funding changes to be introduced which encourage the development of for-profit services in family day care and outside school hours care. An accompanying shift has been the redirection of funds from direct service provision to funding parents as consumers of services. An integral part of these policy shifts has been reconceptualisation of such ECEC services as businesses with a requirement to adopt or strengthen business planning and financial management processes.

A concern of successive Commonwealth Governments has been the number of families who do not have access to formal ECEC options for their young children. Fee subsidies enable access to a range of children’s services for many parents who could not otherwise afford the full cost. Nevertheless, there has been an ongoing tension between the financial viability of services, affordability for parents and the provision and maintenance of high quality for children (including the development and retention of a well-educated and trained child care workforce). The introduction of the new Child Care Benefit is likely to ease some of this tension. In relation to schools and preschools, increasing preschool attendance is a goal of State and Territory governments, as is examining and implementing strategies to facilitate children’s successful transition to school. The National Goals for Schooling provide a nationwide focus for educational outcomes and have drawn attention to the role of ECEC in developing foundation skills and in facilitating children’s achievement at school. The importance of the early years (particularly 0–3) and the impact of early development on children’s dispositions towards, and attitudes to, learning is becoming a key focus of attention for education administrators.

The measuring and reporting of educational outcomes, as a national agenda, is a dominant feature of contemporary Australian schooling that is intended to focus effort on raising standards in Australian schools. This agenda is intended to make schools more accountable to their communities as a means of driving improvements. Specific goals aimed at improving the standards of literacy and numeracy in the early years of school have been successful in focusing on the quality of education provided in the early years, with all States and Territories having literacy and numeracy strategies in place for this period of schooling. The development of national benchmarks and the reporting of nationally comparable results have been a key aspect of the national agenda for schooling in Australia.

In recent years, the focus of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments upon Indigenous education issues has been enhanced by the adoption by MCEETYA of the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The Commonwealth continues to play a strong role in the development of preschool programs across the States and Territories that aim to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous

students. The recently released National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is aimed toward improving outcomes for these students.

The development of early childhood curriculum documents, many of which embrace the years before school as well as the early years of school, can be expected to contribute to ongoing discussion and exchange among early childhood policy makers and practitioners across sectors and settings. Such developments in early childhood pedagogy need to be facilitated by early childhood staff. Hence it is important to take into account current issues relating to the staffing of ECEC. Many areas of Australia are experiencing a shortage of early childhood qualified staff, including teachers. Changes are occurring in relation to staff preparation and training. Several universities have introduced four year teaching degrees for early childhood teachers, whilst vocational training and qualifications have moved to a two year competency based model. The qualifications required to work in early childhood settings are not consistent throughout the country.

The development of research capacity in ECEC has implications for the organisations involved in professional education, particularly given the relative recency of the emergence of researchers in ECEC and the comparatively small numbers of graduates, especially with research training. The increasing interest in promoting research into the early years of life is reflected in some changes in policy and practice, as outlined in Section 5. Australia needs ECEC graduates with the capacity to contribute to the development of early childhood research programs particularly given the complexity of issues confronting ECEC in a time of rapid change.

6.3 Current Developments and Future Directions

Around the nation, the impact of greater attention to the early years is evident in policy and practice. The increase in international research on the importance of the early childhood years to children's future well-being and development has resulted in a greater focus upon the needs of young children. In Australia, information from such research has contributed to a number of reforms in areas concerned with the early years, and to a greater degree of interdepartmental collaboration and exchange. At a State and Territory level there have been structural and policy changes designed to enhance the level of cooperation between the various portfolios concerned with ECEC. In the long term this can be expected to lead to greater cohesion in early childhood policy and the development of shared understandings of children's developmental needs.

At the national level, work commissioned by the then National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (now National Crime Prevention) within the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, resulted in a review of developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia. The resulting report, *Pathways to Prevention* (1999), identified and reviewed detailed information from overseas and Australian research and intervention programs and highlighted the importance of ECEC in developmental crime prevention and early intervention. Subsequently, the developmental framework provided in the report has been applied to other areas such as behavioural and adjustment difficulties, learning problems and health problems.

The National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY) is a recent development resulting from the convergence of the interests of a broadly based coalition of practitioners, policy makers and community groups in promoting a sharper national focus on the early years. The coalition includes both those from the mainstream of ECEC and those working in allied fields, such as paediatrics, social work, criminology, and developmental psychology. As an advocacy group, NIFTeY focuses on the importance of early experience for the development of children as well as the need for increased support for their parents. Partnerships between families, communities, governments and the corporate sector are seen as essential to promote the long-term benefits

that flow from investment in the early years. NIFTeY advocates targeting those at risk within a system that is available to all children.

In April 2000, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Family and Community Services launched the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to which the Commonwealth has committed an additional \$240 million. This Strategy emphasises the role of families and communities in building and providing social support and the value of the developing “social coalitions” between families, communities, governments and the corporate sector.

It particularly focuses on the needs of families with young children, looks to strengthen marriage and relationships, and ways to enhance the balance of work and family responsibilities. The Strategy also provides funding (\$65.4 million) to implement new child care arrangements mainly targeted to home-based care options intended to achieve greater flexibility of provision.

Another part of the Strategy highlights early intervention to strengthen families through the provision of practical skills and support, particularly for families facing difficulties and those whose needs are not currently met by existing approaches. Of particular relevance to ECEC, early intervention, parenting and family relationship support will be expanded through wider availability of parenting skills development programs, the establishment of more playgroups in rural and regional areas and helping families with children with special needs to access playgroups.

As part of the Strategy, the Commonwealth plans to provide funding for an Australian longitudinal study of the development, health and well-being of young children. In the first instance, this will be for four years with a total budget of \$6 million, but with a commitment to support the study in the longer term.

The States and Territories are actively involved in the development of initiatives focused on the early years. Around the country, interesting examples of coordinated community development initiatives with a focus on ECEC are emerging. The New South Wales Government’s Families First initiative highlights family support and community development through the facilitation of partnerships across government, non-government and community sectors. Such partnerships have a focus on increasing the social capital of communities by enhancing the coordination of efforts and the better deployment and utilisation of resources. In Tasmania, the Clarendon Vale Connect Project is jointly supported by the Commonwealth, Tasmanian and local governments to provide support for families and to develop a stronger sense of community in an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. It involves a partnership with the Good Beginnings organisation, a non-government body concerned with support for families with young children. Along with a similar project auspiced by Good Beginnings in Victoria and New South Wales, the Clarendon Vale Project builds on core ideas from the Schools as Community Centres Program developed by the New South Wales Government. The Fun Factory in Perth provides a further example of an ECEC-based support for children from disadvantaged families providing play and recreation opportunities with strong community ownership of the program and its facilities. These are representative of a wider set of innovative projects throughout Australia, which span ECEC and community development. However, many such projects remain at this stage pilot projects and the extent of their impact upon future directions in early childhood service provision remains to be seen.

6.4 Problems and Prospects

Profound social and economic changes provide the backdrop against which many new approaches to ECEC are emerging. It is clear that ECEC in Australia is at a crossroads. One of the major challenges facing the development of ECEC policy at the current time is how to

maintain and enhance the best of the current system whilst fostering the development of effective new responses.

It is timely to articulate a clear national vision for children. Such a vision could encapsulate existing and emerging perspectives in ECEC and help formulate a national framework for the future development of policy throughout Australia. It might, for example, acknowledge:

- ~~///~~ the intrinsic value of children;
- ~~///~~ the central importance of both long and short term outcomes for children in evaluating policy and practice;
- ~~///~~ the strong interrelationship between the education and care of young children;
- ~~///~~ the fundamental significance of the early years in the construction of lifelong learning and knowledge;
- ~~///~~ the increasing need to provide families with appropriate choices for their children; and
- ~~///~~ the crucial contribution of the early childhood years to the development of contributing adults, the well-being of society and the future of the nation.

While articulating a national vision for children is an important issue for Australia, there are some immediate challenges that confront ECEC. This is also a time for ECEC to grasp the opportunities that change and challenge present.

Despite the large scale of Australia's ECEC provision, too many Australian families still do not have access to appropriate ECEC options. Children still may not experience smooth transitions between different ECEC settings. Families with additional needs still may not have these appropriately met. Ensuring quality in the face of diversity and change also represents a major challenge, especially in times of economic constraint and an increasing social divide.

Given these challenges, opportunities exist to further enhance Australia's ECEC provision. For example, consistent with an enhanced national focus on the importance of the early years, it is essential that the nation develop effective strategies to address, among others, the following issues:

- ~~///~~ the provision of good quality, affordable and accessible ECEC in the years before school;
- ~~///~~ the shortage of qualified staff, particularly early childhood teachers, as well as the need to improve staff retention rates and the status of those working in early childhood settings;
- ~~///~~ the recognition of the role of early childhood teaching qualifications in enabling staff to provide the high level planning and programming skills required to facilitate children's development whilst in group care;
- ~~///~~ the expansion of culturally responsive ECEC options for Indigenous communities that are holistic and that address a range of areas including health and development;
- ~~///~~ the enhanced access to ECEC for all children with additional needs, given that there are many children who do not fit within existing guidelines for assistance;
- ~~///~~ the continued facilitation of continuity between all ECEC settings;

- ~~///~~ the further strengthening of partnerships with parents, their communities and ECEC providers;
- ~~///~~ the development of a comprehensive research base and enhanced ECEC research capacity with a greater coordination of research efforts focused more centrally on the key issues confronting ECEC in Australia, including the monitoring of the outcomes for children;
- ~~///~~ the identification of ECEC as a priority research area;
- ~~///~~ the promotion of ongoing dialogue between all relevant Government departments concerned with ECEC and community stakeholders to develop a national framework for early childhood building upon emerging government and community initiatives;
- ~~///~~ the enhancement of cooperation between all relevant portfolio areas to build a shared understanding of ECEC and cohesive policy responses; and
- ~~///~~ the evaluation of new and existing services in the light of outcomes for children in order to provide a better understanding of the implications of policy on the experiences of young children and the factors which give rise to successful ECEC initiatives.

6.5 Conclusion

This report has provided an overview of the context, historical origins, current provision and policy directions of Australian ECEC. A succinct report, as this is required to be, cannot do justice to the historical, cultural, regional and contextual differences that are reflected in the tapestry of policy and provision around the nation. There are many challenges that confront contemporary ECEC. Some of these have been outlined along with some possible directions for future development. By facing these challenges and embracing the opportunities they present, Australia can strengthen its commitment to its children, families and communities, and explicitly recognise that they are the fabric of the future. The time is opportune to embrace the foundational significance of children's early years. In this, and many senses, Australia is a nation at the crossroads.

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Comparison of ages for entry into school based programs in Australia

State/Territory	Entry age into program two years before Yr 1	Entry age into program one year before Yr 1	Entry age into Yr 1	Compulsory starting age
Western Australia	4 by 31 December <i>*From 2001</i> 4 by 30 June	5 by 31 December <i>*From 2002</i> 5 by 30 June	6 by 31 December <i>*From 2003</i> 6 by 30 June	6 th birthday <i>*From 2003</i> from the beginning of the year the child turns 6 years and 6 months
New South Wales	4 by 31 July	5 by 31 July	6 by 31 July	6 th birthday
Victoria	4 by 30 April	5 by 30 April	6 by 30 April	6 th birthday
Queensland	4 by 31 December	5 by 31 December	6 by 31 December	6 th birthday
South Australia	Continuous entry after 4 th birthday	Continuous entry into Reception class after 5 th birthday	Single entry in January after 2-5 terms in Reception depending on initial entry	6 th birthday
Tasmania	4 by 1 January	5 by 1 January	6 by 1 January	6 th birthday
ACT	4 by 30 April	5 by 30 April	6 by 30 April	6 th birthday
Northern Territory	Continuous entry after 4 th birthday	5 by 30 June Continuous intake after 5 th birthday into Transition	Continuous entry after minimum of two terms in Transition	6 th birthday

Table 2: Percentage of Year 3 Students Achieving the Reading Benchmark

State/Territory (1)Average age (2)years of schooling	Percentage of students achieving the benchmark	Percentage of Male students achieving the benchmark	Percentage of Female students achieving the benchmark	Percentage of Indigenous(a) students achieving the benchmark	Percentage of LBOTE(a) students achieving the benchmark
<i>New South Wales</i> 1. 8yrs, 9mths 2. 3yrs, 7mths	91.2 ±2.2	89.6 ±2.6	92.7 ±1.8	77.8 ±4.8	91.3 ±2.3
<i>Victoria</i> 1. 8yrs, 11mths 2. 3yrs, 7mths	86.2 ±2.2	82.6 ±2.9	89.9 ±2.0	68.0 ±5.4	81.1 ±3.0
<i>Queensland(b)</i> 1. 7yrs, 9mths 2. 2yrs, 8mths	82.4 ±2.0	79.9 ±2.3	86.3 ±2.4	66.7 ±3.7	81.8 ±2.8
<i>South Australia</i> 1. 8yrs, 6mths 2. 3yrs, 3mths	83.2 ±3.1	81.5 ±3.4	84.9 ±2.7	64.0 ±6.6	Not Available
<i>Western Australia</i> 1. 7yrs, 7mths 2. 3yrs, 7mths	87.9 ±1.9	85.5 ±2.2	90.4 ±1.6	54.4 ±3.9	85.2 ±2.1
<i>Tasmania</i> 1. 9yrs, 0mths 2. 3yrs, 7mths	85.9 ±2.4	82.0 ±2.8	89.9 ±2.0	76.3 ±3.2	71.1 ±3.6
<i>Northern Territory</i> 1. 8yrs, 8mths 2. 3yrs, 3mths	72.3 ±1.6	69.8 ±1.7	74.9 ±1.2	29.7 ±1.6	18.2 ±0.7
<i>Australian Capital Territory</i> 1. 8yrs, 9mths 2. 3yrs, 6mths	89.9 ±1.5	87.6 ±2.0	92.2 ±1.1	67.2 ±1.1	Not Available
<i>Australia</i>	86.9	84.9	89.7	66.1	Not Available

(a) The methods used to identify Indigenous and LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) students varied between jurisdictions.

(b) Data from Queensland are based on a sample of approximately 10% of Year 3 students from Government and non-Government schools.

This data represents Year 3 students who have achieved the benchmark as a percentage of the students participating in the state and territory testing. The results reported here are for assessed students. This term has been used for students who sat the test and students who were formally exempted. Exempted students are reported as below benchmark and thus are included in the benchmark calculation. Students not included in the benchmark calculation are those who were absent or withdrawn by parents/caregivers from the testing and students attending a school not participating in the testing.

The achievement percentages reported in this table include standard errors, for example, 80% ±2.7%.

Table 3: Fees paid for services included in Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas ^a	ACT	NT
<i>1995-96^b</i>								
Centre based long day care ^c	147.00	146.00	139.00	145.00	159.00	157.00	153.00	132.00
Family day care ^c	128.00	117.00	116.00	125.00	125.00	133.00	122.00	117.00
Vacation care ^c	60.00	77.00	59.00	76.00	52.00	90.00	93.00	98.00
Before school hours care ^d	4.56	3.72	3.14	3.96	2.86	4.34	4.14	2.50
After school hours care ^d	6.35	5.44	5.21	6.27	5.38	5.97	7.77	8.12
Occasional care ^e	3.88	3.35	3.88	3.35	2.48	3.72	3.43	4.40
Other care ^f	130.00	152.00	126.00	151.00	165.00	134.00
<i>1997-98</i>								
Centre based long day care ^c	161.00	157.00	146.00	152.00	165.00	174.00	172.00	149.00
Family day care ^c	139.00	121.00	121.00	140.00	134.00	152.00	151.00	123.00
Vacation care ^c	60.00	71.00	64.00	75.00	62.00	82.00	99.00	85.00
Before school hours care ^d	4.57	3.74	3.46	4.05	2.80	4.15	4.07	2.00
After school hours care ^d	6.48	5.53	5.51	6.18	4.97	6.32	7.85	7.93
Occasional care ^g	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Other care ^g	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
<i>1998-99^h</i>								
Centre based long day care ^c	172.00	164.00	155.00	160.00	168.00	176.00	182.00	153.00
Family day care ^c	149.00	129.00	127.00	151.00	161.00	160.00	160.00	134.00

^a Fees for some services include meals, nappies, administration charges and levies.

^b Fees were provided from the 1996 and 1997 Child Care Censuses.

^c Average weekly fee.

^d Average sessional fee.

^e Average hourly fee.

^f Average weekly fee for multifunctional children's services only.

^g Average weekly fees were not available for the sample week.

^h Estimated fees at June 1999.

na Not available .. Not applicable.

Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSSP). (2000). Table 13A.4.

Table 4: Family Details: Proportion of families receiving Childcare Assistance (CA)¹

	Maximum CA	Partial CA	No CA
	%	%	%
Community Based Centres	39	30	31
Private Centres	45	29	26
Family Day Care Schemes	41	36	23
Sub-Total Long Day Care	42	31	27
Occasional Care Services	26	27	47
Multifunctional Children's Services	40	33	27
Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services*	100	-	-

Childcare Assistance is a means tested payment to assist low and middle income families with the cost of child care. Childcare Assistance is paid by the Commonwealth Government to approved child care services on behalf of eligible families so that fees can be reduced at the time care is provided. The amount of Childcare Assistance a family is eligible for, is determined by a number of factors including income, assets, number of children and amount of care used.

* MACS - All approved places in MACS services attract maximum Childcare Assistance

1. These figures represent families with at least one child under school age.

Source: Department of Family and Community Services
1999 Census of Child Care Services

Table 5: Number of places provided by services included in Commonwealth Government Census of Child Care, (number) ^a

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
<i>1995-96^b</i>									
Centre based long day care	54 200	35 000	50 400	13 900	8 100	2 050	2 950	1 400	168 000
Family day care	19 200	16 400	10 700	3 700	5 100	1 700	2 500	900	60 200
Outside school hours care ^c	24 100	18 200	13 600	6 100	5 500	1 700	2 000	700	71 900
Occasional care ^d	1 400	1 300	750	550	450	250	150	50	4 900
Other care	510	280	200	250	200	30	0	200	1 670
<i>1997-98^e</i>									
Centre based long day care	62 100	43 700	55 000	15 300	10 100	2 600	3 930	1 800	194 530
Family day care	20 500	16 800	11 800	4 000	5 100	2 000	2 600	900	63 700
Vacation care	14 600	4 700	8 200	3 000	4 100	600	960	1 100	37 260
Before school hours care	10 500	6 300	2 900	1 700	3 500	100	460	50	25 510
After school hours care	21 500	17 900	13 900	5 200	7 300	1 500	2 600	1 300	71 200
Occasional care	1 500	1 300	800	500	450	200	130	50	4 930
Other care	550	250	300	270	180	40	0	200	1 790
<i>1998-99^f</i>									
Centre based long day care	62 150	41 350	54 350	14 600	9 900	2 400	3 700	1 850	190 300
Family day care	20 900	16 900	11 900	3 600	5 200	2 040	2 600	900	64 040
Outside school hours care	49 600	40 900	33 150	11 400	16 100	2 850	3 800	3 200	161 000
Occasional care	1 500	1 400	750	500	450	200	130	50	4 980
Other care	500	300	250	300	200	30	0	200	1 780

^a Data sourced from the Child Care System.

^b Number of operational places at June 1996. The numbers of places were rounded.

^c Disaggregated data were not available for vacation care, before and after school hours services.

^d Included neighbourhood model places.

^e Number of operational places at 30 June 1998.

^f Number of operational places at 30 June 1999.

Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSSP). (2000). Table 13A.3.

Table 6: Children Details – Age¹

	< 1 yr	1 yr	2 yrs	3yrs	4 yrs	5 yrs	6+ yrs	Total
Community Based Centres	3 360	12 820	20 280	23 340	18 270	2 160	40	80 270
Private Centres	6 450	24 100	45 200	61 760	56 260	8 770	160	202 700
Family Day Care Schemes	4 550	13 010	15 260	14 370	11 560	2 800	370	61 920
Sub-Total Long Day Care	14 360	49 930	80 740	99 470	86 090	13 730	570	344 890
Occasional Care Services	470	1 580	2 640	2 720	1 300	120	10	8 840
Neighbourhood Model # Occasional Care Services	660	2 190	4 530	5 480	2 230	240	30	15 360
Multifunctional Children's Services	50	160	230	220	210	50	10	930
Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services	70	180	370	470	430	30	10	1,560
TOTAL	15 610	54 040	88 510	108 360	90 260	14 170	630	371 580

1. These figures represent children who do not attend a school.

Source: Department of Family and Community Services
1999 Census of Child Care Services weighted at the national level.

Neighbourhood Model – 1996 Census of Child Care Services

Table 7: Children Details – Hours of Attendance and Proportion of Children Attending With Culturally Diverse Backgrounds¹

	No of Children	Average hours attended	% of Children from Culturally Diverse Background	% of Children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Background
Community Based Centres	80,300	18.6	15%	2%
Private Centres	202,700	19.7	12%	1%
Family Day Care Schemes	61,900	20.3	8%	1%
Sub-Total Long Day Care	344,900			
Occasional Care Services	8,800	7.3	9%	1%
Neighbourhood Model # Occasional Care Services	15,400	*	6%	2%
Multifunctional Children's Services	900	18.1	1%	6%
Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services	1,500	20.1	2%	78%
Mobile & Toy Library Services	2,700	*	2%	9%
TOTAL CHILDREN NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL	374,200			

* Not available as data on attendance hours not collected for these service types

1. These figures represent children who do not attend school. Some services do provide care for a small proportion of school aged children.

Source: Department of Family and Community Services
1999 Census of Child Care Services weighted at the national level

Neighbourhood Model – 1996 Census of Child Care Services.

Table 8: ECEC Regulations by Service Type

State / Territory	Preschool	Long Day Care Centre	Family Day Care	Home Based Care	Mobile Children's Services	Outside School Hours Care
Australian Capital Territory	Mainly operated by Department of Education. Otherwise Children's Services Amendment Bill 1999. Licence Conditions Handbook (No regulations – power stems from Act)	Children's Services Amendment Bill 1999. Licence Conditions Handbook (No regulations – power stems from Act)	No territory regulation if less than 5 children who have not enrolled in school or 8 children under age 12	No territory regulation if less than 5 children who have not enrolled in school or 8 children under age 12	No mobile children services	Children's Services Act
New South Wales	Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Regulation (No2) 1996	Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Regulation (No2) 1996	Family Day Care and Home-based Child Care Services Regulation 1996	Family Day Care and Home-based Child Care Services Regulations 1996	Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Regulation (No2) 1996	No state regulations
Northern Territory	Mainly operated by Department of Education. Otherwise Community Welfare (Child Care) Regulations 1987: Standards NT Child Care Centres 1997	Community Welfare (Child Care) Regulations 1987: Standards NT Child Care Centres 1997	None if less than 6 children under 6 years.	No Territory regulation if less than 6 children under 6 years of age. Guidelines for Home Based Child Care – published but legislated.	No	No territory regulations
Queensland	Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991	Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991	Child Care (Family Day Care) Regulation 1991	Care in a private home not specifically prescribed by regulation.	Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991	No state regulations
South Australia	Mainly operated by Department of Education Training and Employment (DETE). Otherwise Children's Services (Child Care Centre) Regulations 1998	Children's Services (Child Care Centre) Regulations 1998	FDC National Standards in service agreements. DETE must approve services.	No state regulation if less than 4 children. If more than 4 children requires a licence under Children's Services Act	Licensed under the Children's Services Act as a babysitting agency.	OSHC National Standards in service agreements

Continued

State / Territory	Preschool	Long Day Care Centre	Family Day Care	Home Based Care	Mobile Children's Services	Outside School Hours Care
Tasmania	Mainly operated by Department of Education. Otherwise Child Welfare Act 1960 and Regulations 1961. Centre Based Child Care Licensing Guidelines 1998	Child Welfare Act 1960 and Regulations 1961. Centre Based Child Care Licensing Guidelines 1998	Child Welfare Act 1960 and Regulations 1961. Department of Community and Health Services' Outcome Standards.	Child Welfare Act 1960 and Regulations 1961: Department of Community and Health Services' Outcome Standards.	No mobile children services	No state regulations if children over 7 years regulations
Victoria	Children's Services Regulation 1998	Children's Services Regulation 1998		No state regulation if less than 5 children under 6 years of age	Children's Services Regulation 1998	No state regulations
Western Australia	Community Services (Child Care) Regulations 1988 <i>or</i> Education Department: School Education Act and Regulations, 1999	Community Services (Child Care) Regulations 1988	Community Services (Child Care) Regulations 1988	Community Services (Child Care) Regulations 1988	Mobile Kindergarten: School Education Act and Regulations, 1999	Guidelines for OSHC but these are not legislated.

Table 9: Staffing Requirements for Long Day Care Centres in each State and Territory

State/ Territory	Supervisor of centre program	Qualifications specified by the regulations	Age of children	Staff to Child ratios	Numbers of qualified staff
New South Wales	3 year full time university course in early childhood studies <i>or</i>	3 year university course in early childhood studies	0-2	1:5	An authorised supervisor with a minimum of a child care certificate for ?? less than 30 children 1 teaching or non-teaching staff for ?? 30 to 39 children 2 teachers for ?? 40 to 59 children 3 teachers for ?? 60 to 79 children 4 teachers for ?? 80 to 90 children 1 enrolled or registered nurse with a child care certificate or diploma if these children are under 2 years of age
			2-3	1:8	
			3-6	1:10	
	Child Care Certificate: a Certificate of Child Care Studies or Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Studies) from TAFE <i>Or</i> Other qualifications approved by the Minister NB: Must have minimum of 12 months experience in providing childcare services as a member of primary contact staff.	Child Care Certificate: a Certificate of Child Care Studies or Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Studies) from TAFE			
Victoria	Diploma of Children's Services or equivalent	Diploma of Children's Services. 2 year post secondary qualification in early childhood education.	0-3 3-6	1:5 1:15 with a minimum of 2 staff	1 trained staff for ?? 15 children aged under 3 years ?? 30 children aged 3 years and over
Tasmania	3 years tertiary study in early childhood education or equivalent (plus experience)	Diploma of Children's Services or equivalent 3 years tertiary study in early childhood education	0 – 3 3 – 5	1:5 1:10	1 trained staff for ?? 10 children aged under 3 years ?? 20 children aged over 3 years ?? or for mixed age group
South Australia	Director of LDC – no qualification required	2 year Associate Diploma in Children's Services or 3 year Early Childhood Teaching qualification	0 – 2 2 – and over	1:5 1:10	1 trained staff for ?? 20 children aged under 2 years ?? 35 children aged 2-6 years
Western Australia	Degree in early childhood care or education <i>Or</i>	Education degree (4 year) (Teacher registration required to work in preschool)	0 – 2	1:4	1 trained staff for ?? 12 children aged under 2 years ?? 15 children aged 2 – 3 years ?? 30 children aged 3 years and over
			2 – 3	1:5	
	Diploma of Children's Services <i>Or</i>	2 year TAFE Associate Diploma	3 - 6	1:10	
	Mothercraft Nurse Certificate				

Continued

State/ Territory	Supervisor of centre program	Qualifications specified by the regulations	Age of children	Staff to Child ratios	Numbers of qualified staff
Northern Territory	2 year post secondary qualification <i>Or</i> 3 years experience in childcare	2 year post secondary qualification	0 – 3	1:5	1 trained staff for
			3 and over	1:11	?? 10 children aged under 3 years ?? 22 children aged over 3 years ?? 16 children in mixed age groups
Queensland	3 years tertiary study in early childhood (status of Advanced Diploma yet to be determined) for centres with more than 30 children. 2 years tertiary study for centres with less than 30 children	Diploma of Children’s Services <i>Or</i> Endorsement of Chief Executive	0 – 2	1:4	1 trained staff for
			15m – 2.6yrs	1:10	?? 8 children aged under 2 years ?? 10 children aged 15mths – 2.6 years
			2 – 3	1:12	?? 12 children aged 2 – 3 years
			2.6 – 3.6	1:16	?? 16 children aged 2.6 – 3.6 years
			3 - 5	1:24	?? 24 children aged 3 – 5 years
Australian Capital Territory		2 year tertiary qualification	0 – 3	1:5	1 trained staff for
			3 and over	1:11	?? 10 children aged under 3 years ?? 22 children aged over 3 years ?? 15 for mixed age groups

Note: The requirement for qualification of a supervisor may be influenced by the size of the centre – these details are not included.

Table 10: Staffing Requirements for Family Day Care in each State and Territory

State/Territory	Supervisor of family day care scheme	Qualifications specified by the regulations	Age of children	Staff to Child ratios
Australian Capital Territory		Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:4
			Enrolled in school	1:8
New South Wales	3 year university course in early childhood studies <i>or</i> Child Care Certificate: a Certificate of Child Care Studies or Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Studies) from TAFE <i>Or</i> Other qualifications approved by the Minister	Carers must possess a current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:5
			Enrolled in school	1:7
Northern Territory		Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:5
			Enrolled in school	1:7
Queensland		Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:4
			Enrolled in school	1:7
South Australia	Must comply with National standards which require an appropriate qualification	Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:4
			Enrolled in school	1:7
Tasmania		Current first aid certificate	Under age 7	1:4
			Enrolled in school	1:8
Victoria		Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:4
			Enrolled in school	1:7
Western Australia		Current first aid certificate	Not yet at school	1:5
			Enrolled in school	1:7

Table 11: Comparisons of Preschool Programs across Australia**2000: Programs two years prior to entry into Year 1 in Australian States and Territories**

State/Territory	Name of program	Hours attended	Provider
Western Australia	Kindergarten	5hrs 30mins a week	Education Department
New South Wales	Preschool	12hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of School Education; Department of Community Services
Victoria	Preschool	10hrs a week	Dept of Human Services
Queensland	Kindergarten	Up to 12hrs 30 mins a week	Community preschools, child care providers.
South Australia	Kindergarten	10 hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of Education, Training and Employment
Tasmania	Kindergarten	10 hrs a week	Dept of Education
ACT	Preschool	10 hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of Education and Training, Children's Services Branch
Northern Territory	Preschool	12 hrs a week	Dept of Education

2001: Programs two years prior to entry into Year 1 in Australian States and Territories

State/Territory	Name of program	Hours attended	Provider
Western Australia	Kindergarten	11hrs a week	Education Department
New South Wales	Preschool	12hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of School Education; Department of Community Services
Victoria	Preschool	10hrs a week	Dept of Human Services
Queensland	Kindergarten	Up to 12hrs 30 mins a week	Community preschools, crèche providers, child care providers.
South Australia	Kindergarten	10 hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of Education, Training and Employment
Tasmania	Kindergarten	10 hrs a week	Dept of Education
ACT	Preschool	10 hrs 30 mins a week	Dept of Education and Training, Children's Services Branch
Northern Territory	Preschool	12 hrs a week	Dept of Education

Continued

2000: Programs one year prior to entry into Year 1 in Australian States and Territories

State/Territory	Name of program	Days attended	Provider
Western Australia	Pre-primary	4	Education Department
New South Wales	Kindergarten	5	Dept of School Education
Victoria	Preparatory	5	Dept of Education, Employment and Training
Queensland	Preschool	5 half days	Dept of Education
South Australia	Reception	5	Dept of Education, Training and Employment
Tasmania	Preparatory	5	Dept of Education
ACT	Kindergarten	5	Dept of Education and Training
Northern Territory	Transition	5	Dept of Education

2002: Programs one year prior to entry into Year 1 in Australian States and Territories

State/Territory	Name of program	Days attended	Provider
Western Australia	Pre-primary	5	Education Department
New South Wales	Kindergarten	5	Dept of School Education
Victoria	Preparatory	5	Dept of Education
Queensland	Preschool	5 half days	Dept of Education
South Australia	Reception	5	Dept of Education, Training and Employment
Tasmania	Preparatory	5	Dept of Education
ACT	Kindergarten	5	Dept of Education and Training
Northern Territory	Transition	5	Dept of Education

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AECA	Australian Early Childhood Association
AEU	Australian Education Union
AIFS	The Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHWS	The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Studies
ARC	Australian Research Council
ASU	Australian Services Union
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CA	Childcare Assistance
CASEC	Centre for Applied Studies in Childhood Studies
CCCAC	Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council
CSMAC	Community Services Ministers Advisory Council
CESCEO	The Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers
CR	Childcare Cash Rebate
DET	Department of Education and Training (NSW)
DETE	Department of Education, Training and Employment (SA)
DETYA	Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DoCS	Department of Community Services (NSW)
D-SUPS	Disability Supplementary Payment
ESCC	Employer Sponsored Child Care
FaCS	Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
FCS	Family and Children's Services (WA)
FYCC	Department of Families, Youth and Community Care (QLD)
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
IEU	Independent Education Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LHMU	Liquor, Hospitality, and Miscellaneous Workers Union
MCEETYA	The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCAC	National Childcare Accreditation Council
NCP	National Competitions Policy
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
QIAS	Quality Improvement and Accreditation System
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SNSS	Special Needs Support Scheme
SPIRT	Strategic Partnership in Industry Research and Training
SUPS	Supplementary Services Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UNCROC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WA	Western Australia

Appendix C: National Peak Organisations

ACCC	Australian Confederation of Child Care
AECA	Australian Early Childhood Association
AEIA	Australian Early Intervention Association
AFCCA	Australian Federation of Child Care Associations
NACBCS	National Association of Community Based Children's Services
NADRATA	National Alliance of Disability, Resource and Training Agencies
NAMS	National Association of Mobile Services for Rural and Remote Families and Children
NFDCCA	National Family Day Care Council of Australia
NOSHSA	National Out of School Hours Services Association
NPECSN	National Peak Ethnic Children's Services Network
OCCNA	Occasional Child Care National Association Inc
PCA	Playgroup Council of Australia Inc
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Appendix D: Resource and Advisory Agencies

Australian Capital Territory

Children's Services Resource & Advisory Program ACT Inc
YWCA Multicultural Indigenous Children's Services

New South Wales

Community Child Care Cooperative
Ethnic Child Care Development Unit
Fairfield Children's Resource Centre
Illawarra Children's Cultural Resource Unit Inc
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
Murawina (Redfern) Ltd
Network of Community Activities
Newcastle Multicultural Children's Resource Unit
NSW Family Day Care Association

Northern Territory

Australian Early Childhood Association
Southern Region Children's Services Resource and Advisory Program Inc

Queensland

Childcare Access Resource and Training Agency (CARATA) North
Childcare Access Resource and Training Agency (CARATA) South
Family Day Care Association
Family Day Care Resource and Training Consultant
Indigenous Children's Services Unit
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
Queensland Children's Activities Network
Queensland Council of Social Services
Statewide Training and Resource Programme (STAR)

South Australia

Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit
Diversity Directions
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
Multicultural Childcare Unit Inc
Network SA Resource, Advisory and Management Services Inc
Special Needs Network

Tasmania

Lady Gowrie Child Centre

Victoria

Community Child Care Association
Family Day Care Resource Unit
Free Kindergarten Association of Victoria, Multifunctional Resource Centre
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
Noah's Ark Toy Library for Handicapped Children (SET)
Playworks Resource Centre of Children with Disabilities
Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups

Western Australia

Children's Service Support Unit
Ethnic Child Care Resource Centre
Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs (RUCSN)
The Lady Gowrie Child Centre

Appendix E: List of Places Visited

Victoria

Department of Human Services
Department of Family and Community Services
Free Kindergarten Association and Multicultural Resource Centre
Australian Services Union (ASU)
Municipal Association of Victoria
Community Child Care
Lady Gowrie Children's Centre: Work for the Dole Scheme
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Tasmania

Department of Family and Community Services
Department of Education
Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU)
Australian Services Union
Lady Gowrie – Training Unit
Technical And Further Education Hobart
Tasmanian Association of Children's Services

South Australia

Department of Education, Training and Employment
Department of Family and Community Services
Lady Gowrie Children's Centre
Special Needs Network
Torrensville Preschool Centre
Torrens Valley Children's Centre
Brompton Public School Out of School Hours Care

Northern Territory

Department of Family and Community Services
Department of Education
Territory Health
Wanguri Children's Centre
Bachelor MACS
Northern Territory University
Bachelor College (staff and students)

Queensland

Department of Family and Community Services
Families Youth & Community Care
Queensland Council of Social Services
Crèche and Kindergarten Association
Child Care Industry Association (joint meeting)

New South Wales

Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare
LHMU – National Secretariat
Department of Education and Training
National Childcare Accreditation Council

Western Australia

Perth

Childcare Association of WA
Department of Family and Children's Services
Education Department of Western Australia
Fun Factory – Karawarra
Middle Swan Primary School
Midvale Child and Neighbourhood Centre
Office of Aboriginal Health

Kalgoorlie:

Bega Garnbirringu Health Services
Djidjku Pre School
East Kalgoorlie Primary School
Family and Children's Services Office – Goldfields Zone
Goldfields Child Care Co-ordinators Support Group
including AEIOs and ATSIC representatives
Goldfields District Education Office
Kalgoorlie Parent Information Centre
Ngunytju Tjitji Pirni Aboriginal Corporation
South Kalgoorlie Primary School
The Henderson Centre

ACT

Australian Early Childhood Association
Department of Education and Community
Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs
Department of Family and Community Services
Children's Services Providers

Appendix F: List of Websites

Australian Bureau of Statistics

www.abs.gov.au

Australian Early Childhood Association

www.aeca.org.au

Australian Institute of Family Studies

www.aifs.org.au

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

www.aihw.gov.au

Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council

www.cccac.gov.au

Department for Women (NSW)

www.women.nsw.gov.au

Department of Community Services (NSW)

www.community.nsw.gov.au

Department of Education and Training (NSW)

www.det.nsw.edu.au

Department of Education (NT)

www.ntde.nt.gov.au

Department of Education (TAS)

www.tased.edu.au

Department of Education, Employment and Training (VIC)

www.deet.vic.gov.au

Department of Education and Community Services (ACT)

www.act.gov.au

Department of Education, Training and Employment (SA)

www.nexus.edu.au

Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Commonwealth)

www.detya.gov.au

Department of Family and Community Services (Commonwealth)

www.facs.gov.au

Department of Health and Aged Care (Commonwealth)

www.health.gov.au

Department of Human Services (VIC)

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Department of Industrial Relations (NSW)

www.dir.nsw.gov.au

Education Department of Western Australia

www.eddept.wa.edu.au

Education Queensland
www.education.qld.gov.au

Family and Children's Services (WA)
www.fcs.wa.gov.au

Family, Youth and Community (QLD)
www.families.qld.gov.au

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
www.hreoc.gov.au

Macquarie University
www.mq.edu.au

National Childcare Accreditation Council
www.ncac.gov.au

OECD
www.oecd.org

Productivity Commission
www.pc.gov.au

Social Policy Research Centre
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

Territory Health (NT)
www.nt.gov.au/nths

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